The Wrong Colour Green and other stories (Original writing).

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UMI
THE WRONG COLOUR GREEN
AND OTHER STORIES

by

Paul Woolaver

A Creative Writing Project submitted to
the College of Graduate Studies and Research
through English Literature and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, ON, Canada
1998
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0-612-52733-6
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE WRONG COLOUR GREEN</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE INVESTORS</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE HUMAN</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA AUCTORIS</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE WRONG COLOUR GREEN

I was eighteen. Weighing a hundred and seventy pounds, I had fought fifteen street-fights. I was missing a front tooth, and had caused a gap in, at least, one other guy; not that I had only won once.

I had been staggering drunk two hundred times. Just as often, I had been stoned.

I was wearing Kodiak boots. With these boots, I had broken a rib on a fellow and had kicked another in his head.

I was wearing blue jeans and a jean jacket. In my right breast pocket, I had Player's Lights. Also in this package were two weed joints.

The previous week, I had cut pulp for three days. I had been stoned each hour, and one morning I had been hung over. Although the foreman had known of my behavior, he had ignored it, until one afternoon, as he was putting his saw into a log, I tripped backwards and accidentally flung my saw at his ankle. I was fired. With the money I had earned, I paid debts to my buddies. In my right pants pocket, seventy-six dollars remained.

I was walking through a suburb in Banerm, where five thousand people lived. It was noon, August.

Since the age of twelve, I had shot a lot of pool and I was good at it. Besides shooting stick, getting wasted, and fighting, another thing I could do was walk tough. As I was strolling down the road that day, I guess I was figuring the odd person was
watching through his picture window and was noticing my menacing strut. Saying this, I know I'm making fun of myself.

Each morning, I usually got up at around eleven thirty. Although I would wrap my head around toking, shooting pool, and such, I sometimes got aggravated, as if I were chumming with someone I didn't like, but knew no one else.

Ahead of me was the West River Bridge. It was fifty feet long and forty feet high.

I had a friend Rick, who lived in a trailer and made half his money by selling hash. Usually when I came to the West River Bridge, I was going to his place. But on this day, he had the flu. I did not want to catch it and lie in bed, with nothing and everything to think about.

I'd say that the worst way to be messed up is to be unaware of it and not know there are things to straighten out. There might be causes for me being confused that I don't understand; I'm not going to write about it. But I will say I don't entirely blame myself.

Maybe I had glimpsed somebody behaving wisely, or something in me wanted to change. I suppose I was guessing that more than sinking balls and the like should be in the middle of being born and dying. On this day that I'm writing about, I didn't want to shoot pool. Also, I just had argued with my mother; I didn't want to return home. I'm not getting into what we argued about.
I had fought five guys bigger than I. One was forty pounds larger, and everyone had known he scrapped dirty. I had feared him less than the following fact: I could make no sense of stepping one foot past that West River Bridge.

"I'm getting drunk." I think that's what I thought at first. But then, "No, I'm not."

I stopped.

Had I decided to drink, I would have known what would happen: I would have gotten drunk. But I had no experience realizing I was confused. Stopping on the West River Bridge, I think I was courageous.

On the other hand, whereas some down rum in the morning, like it's orange juice, I would not so much reach for booze when I drank, as run from life; and I had gotten smashed so often that lately when I was drunk, I didn't feel like I was cutting loose. So the idea of getting loaded again didn't rattle me much less than stopping on the bridge. So maybe I wasn't courageous.

Even if I was, strength must have been in me, without me knowing. I can't take much credit.

The second after stopping, I realized I was going to freak more than I had figured. I reached for my smokes. If anyone had come along and asked what I was doing, I would have said, "I'm smoking." But I didn't know what I was going to be doing when I was finished that cigarette.
I had no notion how to piece things together. But if I decided to start down the road again, I wouldn't have been able to make more sense of going right than left. I was leaning against the railing. It's good that I wasn't looking down five hundred feet.

When no one was driving by, I slid down the river's bank. Underneath the bridge was gravel and shade. The water gurgled thirty feet wide and two feet deep. I sat on the gravel. I liked sitting by the river. But I felt death beholding me, so to speak. I was unhappy. I was just staring back at death. But I suppose I knew that if I did not make it in life, some people would still sit by the river, and I envied those folks.

Two months before, the guidance counselor at school had called me into his office and had showed me my records. Here are some things I had done: I had gone to the pool hall during classes; I had received grades such as twenty-two and eighteen; I had told teachers to "fuck off"; I had exchanged punches in the hall; I had gotten caught with cheat notes; I had tried to steal a tape recorder from the library; I had smoked and sold weed in the bathrooms; and I had doodled obscene pictures on tables.

The vice-principal had unstacked my records and spread them on his desk.

"If anyone were to ask me about you, this is what I would have to tell them," he had said. "Fills the entire desk, and not one thing is good. I've known other boys with records like this. Some of them are in jail."

Three guys, who I hung out with, also received this lecture, and others, who I knew, got the "you remind me of myself when I was your age" one. We, who got the prison talk, had it over the others, but unless we were drunk, we never bragged. Mostly,
we acted reticent to make the prediction seem serious, as if we were so dangerous and
destined for tragedy, it haunted us.

Two weeks later, a guy from drawing class approached me in the hall. He was artsy, so I didn’t like being seen with him. But I could draw well, which I guess he had noticed. He also must have figured I wouldn’t fear vandalizing public property.

"There’s going to be government cuts," he said. "Art is being eliminated. But if we’re not headed toward good sports, morality and art, where are we going? Perhaps keeping things organized gets confusing; but take pool, for instance; what do you do, just try to keep from scratching? No. You keep your eye on the ball. So some people are organizing to rally against the elimination of art. But I know hardly anyone will show; I thought it was useless. But now I think that protesting, at least, symbolizes justice and keeps people ready. Maybe someday there will be enough people. That’s why I’m wondering if, on the front of the school, you would draw a giant hand giving the finger. That would last longer than a rally."

Two things: Mostly all I drew was naked women on desks; I had been booted from art class and didn’t care about it. Secondly, I couldn’t believe the mouth on this guy. I made it look like I was going to hit him.

"Are you trying to get me in trouble?" I said, threateningly.

But two days later, I awoke at three in the morning and felt like painting that picture. I don’t know why. Probably had nothing to do with art. I used a ladder and red spray paint from my house. On the front of the school, I painted a big red hand giving the finger.
"What changed your mind?" that guy asked me the next day.

"Fuck off," I said.

I did some bragging about the picture, and by afternoon the administration knew I had done it. I was expelled.

Now, a month and a half later, I was sitting by the river; I felt I couldn't stay the same. But the only change I could imagine was that I might get killed. Guys like me often crashed cars. Some of my friends' mothers feared their sons might end up sprawled dead on the pavement next to me, and they hated me. Before colliding, I would scream, but not like someone who feels his life has gone wrong in that fatal moment.

The thought of my death saddened me, but there was one good thing: being something that soon wouldn't be, I had no cause to struggle with the question of who I was. I felt free.

But feeling free, I heard the river. The trickling water sounded good: I felt in that moment that I wanted to live.

From upstream, I heard splashing. It was Old Widow MacDonald.

Everyone in Banerm knew Old Widow MacDonald. Rick once said she wears clothes the color of high-lighter markers. A fellow at the Legion once told me a joke about her. Maybe only people from Banerm would laugh at it, but I'll tell it:

Seems the Queen of England came to Banerm, and downtown, where a crowd had gathered to see her, she stepped onto the podium.

"Hey look, The Queen," Old Widow MacDonald yelled, with enthusiasm.
"Hey look, Old Widow MacDonald," the Queen yelled, with equal enthusiasm.

When I heard this, I laughed. Old Widow MacDonald is usually up to something, and people are always looking at her. They say she's eccentric.

A hundred and fifty feet up the river, she had been trying to pull a rubber dingy out of the woods. She had slipped and flopped backwards into the water. But she was unhurt, even though she was about seventy. She sat in the river and splashed water over her head; I laughed at her. She pushed herself up, on all fours for part of the wobbly ascent. Water was dripping from her. She dislodged the dingy from the trees and tossed it into the river. She tried to board it, but flopped backwards once more into the water. She pushed herself up again, holding onto the dingy with one hand to keep it from drifting away in the current. Once she was in the dingy, she started floating and paddling downstream toward me.

She drifted to a place too shallow: she had to get out and grab the front of the dingy and pull it over the slightly submerged pebbles. She was wearing a bright red and green dress, which being wet, clung so tightly that I could see how she would look naked. It was not the prettiest sight.

She came to a second spot where she had to get out. This time she gestured, with her forefinger, that momentarily, she would make it to me. I thought she was going to ask if I wanted to hop in.

When she floated to where I was sitting, however, she said, "Excuse me. I'm wondering if you would do me a favor? This bridge needs paint, and from my house, it's ugly. Would you please paint it? If you do, thank you. If not, no harm in having
asked, and feel free to drop by my house sometime, for a peanut butter and ham
sandwich. Have a good day."

Digging her paddle into the gravel, Old Widow MacDonald pushed off. She
floated away.

I watched her. She hit another shallow spot and crawled out of the dingy again,
staying low so as to keep her balance. She noticed I was looking. She waved. But I
turned my head, as if not to see. When she boarded again, I watched her float around the
bend.

I had heard talk about Old Widow MacDonald drifting down the West River.
The river intercepts Main Street, and she usually disembarked there to call a taxi to
transport her and the dingy home. I figured she would arrive there in forty-five minutes;
I thought this short pleasure of floating down the river was not worth her trouble.

I remembered, though, that she lived a hundred feet upstream; I thought of her
request.

"I'm not painting a bridge," I figured.

But for ten minutes I sat, and the river flowed. I began feeling bad again. I
recalled my misery before Old Widow MacDonald had floated along and I had laughed
at her.

"What if I paint it?" I speculated, although it was the craziest thought I had ever
had.

For fifteen more minutes, I sat. The thought of painting the bridge sort of
mingled with the trickling river.
Strange though it was, I started wondering if deciding to paint the bridge would be the only way to avoid the bad feeling. I began to feel trapped by this wondering. For ten more minutes, I sat by the river.

"Old Widow MacDonald says that, from her house, the bridge is ugly," I thought. "Maybe I'll paint it. I see sense in that."

Thinking this made me nervous.

"If one second, all I do is drink, smoke, fight, and such," I thought. "And the next, I contemplate painting this bridge for Old Widow MacDonald, then nobody sitting by this river is ever going to know who they are."

I thought this idea was so strange that I almost felt afraid some funky creature would crawl from the river and make crazy faces at me. I rose from the gravel.

"From Old Widow MacDonald's house, the West River Bridge looks ugly," I thought again, feeling freaked out. "I should paint it."

Crazy though it was, I saw sense in this idea. For a long time, I had been messed up; the idea of painting the bridge was the only sense I had seen for as long as I could remember.

I moved from underneath the bridge to survey the railings. They were green and needed paint. I climbed to the road on top; I looked at Old Widow MacDonald's house and saw that she could see the bridge from her porch. I ambled back beneath. I sat by the river.

"I might paint this bridge," I thought.
But I began to care about painting the bridge; I began caring about me. The river was deep in parts, and from far back, it flowed. Again I began feeling unhappy.

"I'm not painting a bridge," I decided.

The bad feeling left. But again there was death. I guess I didn't want that.

"I'll think about painting it," I thought. "No harm in just thinking about it."

This notion made me feel good enough to get loaded.

I got from underneath the bridge and walked to the liquor store, where I bought two pints of rum to carry in my jean jacket. For three hours, I shot eight-ball at the pool hall, and I drank. At nine-thirty, I left. I walked to Rick's, who despite his flu, sipped my rum when I offered. We finished my second pint and smoked two joints. I was wasted.

"Old Widow MacDonald says that, from her house, the West River Bridge looks ugly." I said to him, slurring my words. "I'm thinking of painting it."

"She's crazy," Rick said.

"Doesn't mean I am."

"I'm not helping you."

I believe, however, that he also said, "I suppose it would be nice to do, even though people could think other things about it."

But I was so drunk, stoned, and sleepy I'm not sure whether he actually said that, or if I imagined or dreamt it.

The next morning, I awoke on his living room floor. I had suspected I might lose the feeling that I should paint the bridge, but I hadn't. I knew then that I would do it.
I stopped only to guzzle a glass of water from Rick's kitchen sink; I walked out of his trailer and started for the hardware store.

"Old Widow MacDonald says that from her house the West River Bridge looks ugly, and I'm going to paint it," I kept saying to myself, although I was half thinking I was nuts.

When I reached the hardware store, I thought the clerk might consider me strange for wanting to paint the bridge, and wouldn't sell me paint. As I entered, and a bell above the door jingled, I didn't look at the clerk. Nevertheless, a minute later, when I was deciding on a can of paint, he all of a sudden was standing next to me in the aisle.

"What color are you looking for?" he asked, politely.

He had surprised me.

"Green," I said, reluctantly.

"What are you using it for?"

A way to get rid of him occurred to me.

"I'm making something green," I said, sarcastically.

Although he laughed, I didn't. He left me alone in the aisle. I bought two big cans of paint and a brush. After I left, I went to a grocery, where I got two egg sandwiches, a half liter of milk, and a large bottled water. Carrying all of this, I began walking toward the West River Bridge, and as I walked, I ate the sandwiches, although it was awkward because my hands were full.

When I reached the bridge, it was eleven thirty. I put my stuff by one of the railings and went beneath. For ten minutes, I sat by the river. I decided for the final time
to paint the bridge. I climbed on top; I realized I had nothing with which to open the can.

"I'm not painting a bridge," I thought.

But I decided to walk to Old Widow MacDonald's to see if she had a shed. She did, a brown one. I unhooked the latch, went in, and there were screwdrivers on a workbench. I took one, went back, and pried open the can. I dipped my brush and started spreading the paint.

For two hours, I thought of nothing but dipping my brush and spreading the paint. Behind me I heard the odd car slow down and I knew the people in them were checking me out. I did not look at, nor think about them. I kept spreading.

I almost had one side the new green. I heard a car go by; it stopped and reversed. I looked up. It was Sam, Allan, and Shawn, buddies of mine: Sam was driving, Allan was in the front passenger seat, and Shawn was in back.

Allan rolled down the window.

"What are you doing, community service?"

I should have realized some of my pals would drive by. I should have planned to lie, saying I had been charged with disorderly behavior or something. But I hadn't. I stared at Allan so long without speaking, that he would have known I was lying.

"No, I'm not," I said.

"Don't tell me you're working for the town?"

I wondered if they might understand it, although I knew they wouldn't.
"From her house, Old Widow MacDonald finds the bridge ugly," I said. "That's why I'm painting it."

Sam leaned over from the driver's seat.

"You're painting the West River Bridge because Old Widow MacDonald asked you?"

"Yeah."

"Why?" Sam asked me, sarcastically.

"Old Widow MacDonald is crazy," Shawn said, from the back seat.

"Why?!" Sam asked me again.

They weren't even trying to see it the way I did. I already had painted half. I got irritated at their hasty judgement.

"There's no more why than what I said."

Sam got agitated at my remark. I was surprised how agitated he got. He leaned over again.

"So what," he said.

"Yeah, so what," Shawn agreed.

They were being aggressive. I started to get angry.

"Who gives a fuck so what?"

"What a pansy," Shawn said.

"Why are you being a pansy?" Allan asked.

As for Sam, he looked irate.

"What do you mean who gives a fuck?" he said.
Hearing this, I didn't know who he thought he was getting angry at me. I
wouldn't have gotten so angry if he hadn't.

"There's going to be a streak of paint down your car," I warned him.

"I'll punch your head," he threatened.

"So what."

I lifted my brush. He squealed away, but thirty feet up the road he skidded to a
stop. I thought he was going to get out. But he had no reason to think that he could beat
me. He remained on the road a minute, the car idling. He didn't get out. He squealed
down the road.

I wanted to think about what had just happened. I slid down beneath the West
River Bridge again. Also, I was hungry; not that I had food under there.

From my anger, Sam had seen that I would have smeared his car. I knew that, if
I had, we would be enemies. I hardly had known what I was saying; but I was glad I had
made that threat. I began realizing that, although painting the West River Bridge for Old
Widow MacDonald would only take about five hours, it would be part of who I was
from now on. Already, I couldn't change the fact that half was the new green. I felt I
liked this circumstance. Even though I was hungry, I decided to finish the West River
Bridge.

I rose from the gravel. By the river was a birch tree, about twenty feet tall. I
grabbed one of its leafy branches and pulled myself up the bank. I climbed over the
bridge railing. I saw that next to my unopened can was a full pitcher of lemonade, and
two sandwiches were on a white plate. I was surprised by this. They were ham and
peanut butter: I knew Old Widow MacDonald had put them there. I figured she was strange, but I was hungry: I was glad to see this meal. She had provided a glass, but I guzzled half the lemonade from the pitcher. I ate the sandwiches and enjoyed them.

When I was done and full, I picked up my brush and started spreading the paint again.

For two more hours, I did nothing but dip and spread the paint onto the railing. More than half the second side was the new green when two cops drove thirty feet past me, parked, and walked back. Out of the corner of my eye I watched them coming up the sidewalk. I kept spreading paint onto the railing.

"How are you today, sir?" one said.

"I'll be better when I'm off work," I lied, keeping my head down and continuing to brush.

But they didn't believe me. One was shorter than the other.

"This is town property," he said. "What are you doing?"

Thinking about what to say, I paused. My brush hung by my side. I decided that maybe they would see sense in it.

"From her house, Old Widow MacDonald finds the bridge ugly," I said. "She asked me to paint it."

"What?" the other officer asked, as if he had heard, but couldn't make sense of it.

"She made me ham and peanut butter sandwiches and lemonade," I explained. I pointed to the empty plate and the pitcher.

"Ham and peanut butter?" the short cop asked.

I was thinking of what to say to him
"You're painting this bridge the wrong colour green," the taller cop announced, out of the blue.

I did not want to hear that. I had bought a dark green, but when I had started brushing, I had seen it was lighter than what usually is on bridges. I thought I was making the West River Bridge look like a toy. But I had wanted to paint the bridge. I had ignored the fact that I was using the wrong colour.

I pondered a minute, thinking of what to say.

"Do you know Old Widow MacDonald?" I asked, after about ten seconds.

"Everyone does."

"Don't you think she would like this colour?"

But the other cop interrupted.

"This is town property. It doesn't matter what Widow MacDonald thinks."

My brush was still in my hand. This cop began reaching for it; at least I think he did. I stepped back.

"If you try taking this, I'll paint your face."

He didn't like me saying that.

"Put it down," he said.

"I only got a quarter left. Might as well finish."

But he did not seem to listen to me. He looked set on taking my brush.

I got awful angry, fast. I was surprised how fast I got angry.
"I'll start swinging," I said. "I've seen cops fight, and I don't want to mess with one, but I will start swinging, so as not to make a liar of myself, just like I said I was painting this bridge, and I am."

But he still looked like he was thinking of taking my brush. I was going to hit him. I knew that, half an hour later, I would be sitting in jail, but I would want to be there if I could not finish the bridge.

But Banerm cops don't like trouble. I figured they knew I would bloody them, and I was hoping they might not bother with me. I looked down at my kodiaks, so as to suggest they would get them in the shins and nuts.

Getting an idea, the taller cop asked the other one to step aside and talk with him. I went back to spreading the paint. They spoke fifteen feet from me. I kept an eye on them, but I continued spreading. After five minutes, the taller one came over.

"Lets see some I.D." he said.

I showed him my driver's license, and he took it and didn't give it back. They got in their car and drove off. I was happy to see them go.

There was a little lemonade left. I raised the pitcher to drink, and the liquid splashed against my mouth, some trickling down my jaw, neck, and chest. My thirst quenched, I put the pitcher down and went back to spreading the paint. For another hour and a half, I did nothing but dip and spread. When I was done, all of both railings were a bright green.

I carried the paint cans, the brush, the plate, and the pitcher to Old Widow MacDonald's house and placed them beside it. I walked to the pool hall. At the tavern
across from it, I bought a hamburger and french fries. Later, I shot stick for an hour and a half. When I left, I went to Rick’s. I did not mention painting the West River Bridge. I walked home and went to bed.

Those two cops had decided that when I was home getting out of bed would be an easier time to deal with me, and the next morning at eleven-thirty they came to my door. I was home alone. They charged me with vandalism and threatening an officer; they gave me a slip of paper, which said when I had to appear in court. At ten to noon, they were pulling out of my driveway. My father was pulling in for lunch.

He already had heard at work that I had painted the West River Bridge, and also that I had used the wrong colour green. He was mad as hell.

“What the fuck is the matter with you?” he shouted, standing in our living-room.

I hoped he might see sense in it.

“From her house, Old Widow MacDonald ...”

But he cut me off.

“What are you, crazy?”

I was going to say, “I don’t know.” But I changed my mind.

“No, I’m not,” I said.

This assertion irritated my father.

“You’re not? He yelled. “Tell me why your not."

Then I said, “I don’t know.”

He stayed angry at me.

“What do you mean you don’t know?” he demanded.
I tried thinking of an answer, but I was taking so long that my father got frustrated with me. He turned his back and looked out our living room picture window. I wanted to leave the room; but I knew we were not done speaking and that, if I left, he would get angry. Also, I figured he knew I had painted the bridge for Old Widow MacDonald.

But he turned and faced me again and still was angry.

"You can’t even paint a fuckin bridge?"

I thought that, just because I had picked the wrong colour green, this didn’t mean I put it on incorrectly, but I knew that, if I mentioned this thought, my father would think I was trying to be smart.

I got a bit angry at him.

"I don’t know," I said, with a bit of a bite in my voice.

My father got that look. He slowed his voice.

"Are you getting mouthy?"

He had asked me this question many times before. I always was biting back anger, but would answer “no.” He, however, often wouldn’t like my tone, so like he was giving just one more chance to answer right, he would repeat, “Are you getting mouthy?” One way or the other, he’d usually end up swinging. I knew that, this time, he was going to try that again. I never before had swung at him, but I dashed forward and cracked him in the jaw. He fell back three feet. I didn’t want to go full out with him. I darted for the front door. It being summer, only the screen was shut, and I ran through so fast I busted the hinges. I felt hairs in the back of my head come out in my father’s
hand. I knew I would never be able to return. As I scooted down the driveway, he told me so: "You won't be coming back through this door you broke you little fucker. You're fuckin lucky I didn't get you."

I walked to the West River Bridge again. I sat under it, on the gravel by the river. I had run out of my parent's house in a t-shirt, shorts, and bare feet, and I didn't have my jeans, jacket, Kodiaks, wallet, smokes, or weed. I felt bad, but better than before.

I, however, was hungry and thirsty. Kneeling on the gravel, I dipped my face in the West River and drank the water, even though it probably was polluted. My hair got wet, and water dripped down my left arm, but the weather being hot, I liked the coolness.

My thirst quenched, I felt more hungry. I figured that, since Old Widow MacDonald had requested I paint the West River Bridge, and I had bought the paint, she owed me at least a couple more sandwiches. I decided to go to her place to ask.

I approached her house. Old Widow MacDonald was sitting in a chair on her porch. She was wearing the same bright, red and green dress she had on two days before. She recognized me.

"You did a great job on that bridge," she said.

I sat on her steps. I felt indifferent. I hardly cared if I got the sandwiches.

"I painted it the wrong colour green," I said in a melancholy tone. "I did it by accident, but knew you'd like it."

"How did you know?" Old Widow MacDonald asked.
"It matches your dress."

"Oh," she said. Then she explained, "I saw two men on the bridge this morning. They were talking about painting it again."

"They're probably working for the town and are going to paint it the right colour green."

For a number of minutes, Old Widow MacDonald and I gazed at the bright green West River Bridge.

"I can't make heads or tails that one colour green is righter than another," she said, after the silence.

"That bridge doesn't look right to me," I disagreed, solemnly.

Old Widow MacDonald looked at it a second time.

"It's different," she said. "I can't make sense that it's wrong."

"That probably has something to do with the fact that you make ham and peanut butter sandwiches and float down the West River in a rubber dingy."

Old Widow MacDonald did not respond to my remark. A silence followed. But she did not appear as if she hadn't heard me, but as though she were listening to something else. Seeing this attentiveness, I opened my own ears, so to speak. I heard a thousand blended notes. They were the river. I listened to this trickling sound. I looked far down the road. I reclined into a sweet mood: the pleasant thought of the river brought sad thoughts to my mind.

Later, I was sitting at Old Widow MacDonald's kitchen table. She was at the counter, making me two ham and peanut-butter sandwiches, and one for herself.
One of the oddest things about her kitchen was a dozen goldfish swimming in the sink.

"Why do you have them in there?" I asked.

"It's easy to change the water," she said.

She washed her dishes in the bathtub in the bathroom adjacent to the kitchen. I also noticed there were about fifteen glasses in different spots, each filled with dandelions. But what I noticed most was that on the kitchen table she had seven photos of me painting the West River Bridge, and five after I was done. These photos freaked me.

"Mrs. MacDonald," I said, amazed. "Why do you have these?"

"I was waiting for something important to happen around here," she said. "They were my last pictures. It's one of those new cameras that develops them itself, although I can't get film for it anymore. I got seven of you painting the bridge, five when you were done, and I also got some close up. I'm going to glue them to red bristle board and tape them up in the living room."

That afternoon, although I felt strange, we pasted these pictures to bristle board and put them on the wall. That night, I slept on Old Widow MacDonald's living room couch.

At ten the next morning when I awoke, I called Rick. I asked to borrow some of his clothes and two hundred and fifty dollars. Although he argued some, he said I could.
That evening, I returned to Old Widow MacDonald’s and asked if I could move in with her. She said yes. I gave her the two hundred and fifty dollars for the first month’s rent. We cleaned a spare bedroom, and I slept there from then on.

A couple of days later, two men working for the town repainted the West River Bridge the normal colour green, and Old Widow MacDonald and I watched from her porch. At five o’clock they were done. We walked to it.

"You painted this bridge in less time than those two," Old Widow MacDonald remarked. "And they left streaks, but you didn’t. I can show you in the pictures."

Five houses up from Old Widow MacDonald’s there was a house which I thought needed paint. The next day I knocked at the door.

"I’m the one who painted the West River Bridge the wrong colour green," I said to the owner. "I may not have chosen the right colour, but putting it on, I took half the time as the workers from the town, and I didn’t leave streaks like they did. Here’s a picture that proves it."

The owner looked at the picture. He asked why I had painted the bridge and why I had a photo of it. When I told him, he looked at me like I was strange. But he pondered the picture again.

"I’ll think about it," he said. "You can ask again tomorrow."

The next day, he said "yes." Two days later, I was done painting his house. He then told me that in two weeks he was going on vacation, and I could paint the inside. I still paint houses.
A month after moving in with Mrs. MacDonald, I went to court for vandalism
and threatening an officer. I told the judge why I had painted the West River Bridge.

"I had not wanted to fight those two cops," I also said. "But I had wanted them to
think I would, so they wouldn't stop me. It worked."

The judge knew I was living with Mrs. MacDonald.

"What do you think about this?" she asked.

I wish I had told her I liked it, but instead I tried thinking of what she wanted to
hear, and I took so long I saw she was getting frustrated.

"I don't know," I said.

She sentenced me to twenty hours community service. She also said I had to see
a psychiatrist.

When I was leaving, though, I decided the truth was that I liked living with Mrs.
MacDonald.

"I like living with her," I said; but I didn't stop to see how the judge reacted.

Over the next month, I did the community service, but never went to the
psychiatrist and never heard anything about the fact that I didn't.

Meanwhile, Mrs. MacDonald had a shed in her backyard, and she was bad at
picking colours: she liked that green I had used, and since town workers had repainted
the bridge, she supposed she might as well have my colour green on the shed. I figured
she thought I would be flattered. But I thought that color was too bright. I disliked it.

Furthermore, I had become accustomed to sitting in the back yard for hours,
trying to make sense of myself, and the fact that I was living with Old Widow
MacDonald. Half the time, I felt like freaking out. The shed was brown, which I liked. I was surprised how, being on edge, it was important to me that the shed wasn't an ugly green. I decided that instead of painting it, I would draw a picture of the West River Bridge on the side of it facing opposite the back yard. I would use the green paint, which I hoped would gratify Mrs. MacDonald.

As I explained, I had used to scrape naked women into desks. Also, when I was young, I had used to doodle all the time. I knew I could draw.

I cut half the bristles off my brush, so it was thin, and in order to do tiny details, I bunched together ten of the cut off strands. I drew me under the bridge, and Mrs. MacDonald falling in the river. I had her arms twirling, trying to catch her balance. On me, I used thin lines and did not complete parts, so I looked confused and unhappy.

I showed Mrs. MacDonald; she raised her eyebrows and was pleased.

I think this was a great moment in my life. I will try to explain how I felt, and I will compare my feeling to how people sometimes feel when they watch television. Sometimes the picture becomes blurry. The characters get ghosts, so to speak. But someone goes to the t.v., moves one of the knobs a millimeter, and with this easy action, the ghosts are absorbed back into the characters. The folks watching say, "There, that's it."

That's sort of how it was. I began sketching again, all the time. It didn't solve all my problems, but it was my hope. I drew things like the guidance counselor spreading my records on his desk, and me dipping my brush and spreading paint on the bridge. On the walls in my new room, I spread these pictures.
THE INVESTORS

There were four investors who were thinking of financing a plan of mine. I had just met with them for two hours. Over the past year, we had met five times. I was sitting in my car in the parking-lot of the building in which they had their office.

Helped by an inheritance from my parents, my wife and I had taken ten years to save a quarter of the three hundred thousand dollars I needed to finance my plan. The investors were thinking of contributing the other three quarters. I was thirty-six years old.

My idea was to buy and renovate an abandoned building containing fifteen large offices. The investors liked the idea, but were hesitant to agree to it. As they would not have time to pay attention to the project themselves, their decision depended on whether they thought I could see the plan through successfully, alone.

For the building to provide a worthwhile profit, I would have to ensure that the renovations were done cost efficiently, and then I would have to keep the building full of renters. I would need skills like marketing, bookkeeping, and plumbing. But I was a school teacher; I knew little about those things. From the perspective of the investors, it was uncertain I would succeed.

They were trying to determine if I could adapt to these challenges and make my plan work, even if at times it got difficult. They, basically, were trying to figure out if I was a winner or a loser. They began looking at me “personal-like.” Their behavior became weird.
An example of this strangeness happened at our third meeting, during which we were to examine details of the renovations, which, over the prior two months, I had spent sixty hours deciding upon with a carpenter. I arrived for the meeting twenty minutes early. The investors were in the conference room. As I entered, I thought I heard a remark that was incongruous with what a normal person would expect they might overhear in such a situation.

I will reveal what I thought I heard, but first let me say that one reason I think I heard the statement correctly is that the investors were startled, as if one of them had said something as absurd as what I thought, and they were concerned I had overheard it.

From the look on my face, they could tell that, indeed, I had overheard the remark. They sensed I was going to ask about it. One of them, Ruth Williams, stopped me.

“You’re here!” she said, awkwardly. “Perhaps we should start. I think everyone is ready.”

The other three, Clark, Allen, and Edward, followed her lead.

“Hello,” they said, also awkwardly, and agreed we might as well begin.

When I had entered, the investors had been standing. Now they seated themselves at the conference table.

Their effort to prevent me from asking about what I had heard further indicates one of them had made a statement as weird as what I thought. Otherwise the investors would have filled me in on the remark, since I obviously was curious about it.

“I may have proof he was a breech baby,” is what I thought one of them had said, as if whoever had said it had voiced it once already, and someone had doubted it, so the
first person was explaining there might be proof to back the claim. I was unable to distinguish who. And I know it is hard to believe. I, however, have another reason to suspect the investors capable of being concerned with such a petty matter. I will elaborate on this other reason shortly.

If they backed my plan, I could retire possibly ten years earlier than otherwise. Having heard this ludicrous remark about me, however, perhaps I should have said the hell with them. But you must understand that my plan had occupied my mind for about five years. I had put time and money into it, had lost sleep over it. And the investors recently had begun looking at me so personally I felt the only explanation for their bizarre interest in the false information I was a breach baby was that they might infer from it that I still did things backwards, which might influence their decision.

But I was frustrated because, although I wanted to clarify that I had not been a breach baby, I felt the investors would find me unacceptably peculiar to believe I had heard such a strange thing, even though one of them had made the remark. Since they were now seated at the table and were ready to begin, I could not with spontaneous bewilderment react to the odd statement, so it was impossible for me to address it without appearing odd.

I, however, desired the investment so much that as the meeting proceeded I tried thinking of a subtle way raise the topic of breach babies somehow to let the investors know I had not been one. I am embarrassed to admit this, but it is true. Since it would have been ludicrous though, I managed to refrain. I relied on the possibility that, if I proved myself competent during our meetings, the investors would back me.
But I'm sure it was obvious to them that I was confused by the paradox that my lack of certainty prevented me from asking about the remark. When I left after the meeting, they probably laughed at my expense; I disliked the fact that I ended up looking and feeling stupid in this way.

The other reason I suspect these investors capable of making such an absurd judgment has to do with a game of pool I had with the one of them named Clark.

An evening a week after our third meeting, Clark phoned me.

"Why don't you come to my house and shoot some stick," he said, as if I would have accepted the invitation as quickly had he asked me to come wash his car: he knew how badly I wanted him and the others to back my plan.

Driving to his house, I expected he had had something to say about the investment. When I arrived however, he appeared not to. He wanted to play pool. As it would have been bizarre to say literally nothing of the investment, we did speak some of it, but Clark said nothing which had not been said already.

It was weird. The only explanation I could imagine for him inviting me to his house was that, since the decision was taking a long time, he was pitying me, and he thought pool would help me unwind. I, however, did not sense pity.

We played pool. By the third game Clark had determined I was a decent pool player. Near the end of this game, I saw the reason he had invited me.

It was my shot on the eight ball, which was the length of a pool stick from the white ball, and was a tough cut to the corner pocket. But since I was a good shot, if I missed, it would not be due to lack of my having the necessary skill.
Clark had had a shot on the eight ball before me, and it was so easy it seemed obvious he had missed on purpose. I hold that Clark had set the balls up to see if I was a choker. Furthermore, after he had missed his shot, he had not said the expected, “I can’t believe I missed that”; he looked at me as he backed away from the pool table, and menacingly, his face seemed to say, “It’s your shot now.” I believe that in order to put extra pressure on me, he wanted me to know he was testing me.

So all of a sudden the investment seemed to depend on if I sank the eight-ball. I was stunned.

“If I miss this shot, you will conclude I will choke on the business plan?” I wanted to ask him incredulously.

However, again, for me to articulate such a strange assertion would have been bizarre. Clark, nevertheless, knew I was thinking it.

“That’s right!” his face sardonically seemed to say.

As I’ve explained, I wanted them to invest in my plan. My heart began racing.

“This is crazy,” I thought. “I’ve got to make this.”

I decided to make the shot and to think later about how nuts it was.

“Make the shot,” I thought. “It’s almost as important as when you stood in front of the school board for your teaching job.”

“Why is it so serious in here!?” I imagine anyone would have exclaimed had they walked in the room at that moment. I did not care that I was so serious. Clark knew why.

Once psyched, I became totally focused on making the shot. As mentioned, the eight was a pool stick’s length from the cue, not an easy shot. But sometimes I line up the
ball so well I know I will make it. The first time I addressed this shot, however, I did not feel that way. I was determined not to shoot until I knew I would make it. I stepped back from the pool table and took a breath.

The second time I addressed the ball I lined up perfectly, and there were about four seconds when I felt sure of pocketing the ball. I shot. The eight-ball rolled into the corner pocket.

"Yes!!" I exclaimed, almost at the top of my lungs.

I had not looked at Clark for about four minutes. He now did something which irritated me. I, however, understand why he did it.

Before I explain, let me make it clear that I have no doubt I was right Clark intended for me to think missing the shot would negatively influence the decision about the investment.

But now he acted as if the shot had not been important. When I got excited upon making it, he looked at me as if I were behaving strangely.

"Nice shot," he said sarcastically, as if that's all it were. He began racking the balls as if pool were all that was on his mind.

To understand how goading this was you have to realize there is no way I was wrong about the significance of that shot. I am also sure Clark wanted me to know the shot was significant. I have not a trace of doubt about this.

Clark was abusing the fact that I wanted him and the other investors to back my idea. He knew he was being a jerk; he wanted to be this way. I figure there were three reasons.
Before I explain, I should say that I don’t mean Clark planned these developments. I think he simply thought “I’ve got to get to know this guy personally. I’ll have him over for pool.” As we played, he would be he, I would be I, and when I left, he would have a feeling for the type of person I am.

The first reason is this: the fact that I had shown I am not a choker meant he would not not invest in my idea, but it did not mean he would invest in it. He did not want to get me thinking he would back my plan for certain.

He, however, could have expressed this more tactfully.

“Nice shot,” he could have said. “But there is more to life than pool.”

Instead, he sadistically mocked me, and herein lies the second reason. He and the other investors could not decide to invest in my idea or not, and no one enjoys hard-to-make decisions. Since I was causing Clark this confusion and suffering, he hated me. So he took advantage of the fact that, since I wanted him to invest in my idea, he could mock me without me retaliating; he got revenge on me.

The third reason is this sadism served a purpose.

My objective was to get Clark to invest in my idea. In this situation in which he was mocking me, the means to success was to humour his behavior. The mistake was to get angry.

But I do not expect myself to be perfect.

“I’ve reached my limit,” I am often willing to think. “I’m going to make a mistake and I don’t care.” Later, I am regretful: “I wish I hadn’t done that.”
Clark’s countenance said, “Look, I’m mocking you. What are you going to do about it?”

This taunting expression on his face was taxing. Furthermore, as a school teacher I had a steady income, so although I wanted Clark’s money, I didn’t need it. Yet I was letting him play head-games with me for the sake of money. I got an angry feeling in my stomach. I thought maybe it was not worth it. Unprogressive words came to my tongue, such as,

“That’s enough pool for me. I better get going.”

Unless willing to make a mistake, you do not say this to someone who may invest in an idea of yours and has invited you to play pool to see what sort of person you are.

Furthermore, if Clark and the others invested in my idea and I had to deal with contractors and keep the building occupied with renters, there would be taxing situations. Clark was testing to see how I would react to these difficulties.

The third purpose of him mocking me and making me angry was to see if I was the sort who lost control of my emotions and made mistakes.

Although I almost made the mistake, I managed to keep my mouth shut. Clark racked the pool balls. I waited for my anger to subside and I could think straight. Clark seemed to accept this. He respected the fact that there needed to be silence while I put a clamp on telling him off. As he racked the balls, he sort of removed himself from my presence.
Appreciating the fact that he did this, my bitterness began to sizzle out. After thirty seconds, the chewing feeling in my stomach was gone. I had warded off my anger. I felt victorious. I wanted to show off my calm.

"It was a tough shot," I said in a even-tempered tone. "But I knew I was going to make it."

Clark tested me yet again.

"I beg your pardon," he said impatiently, as if he did not know why I was dwelling on the shot.

I looked him in the eye, calmly.

"I was explaining that I sometimes know I'm going to make a shot. That was one of them."

Clark looked at me inquisitively. His face became sincere, and he looked me in the eye.

"It was a heck of a shot," he conceded. "You made certain it went in."

That evening, Clark and I parted well.

I have a habit of not covering my mouth when I sneeze. I make a fist, which I usually get only half way to my face. At best, this effort is a poor attempt at a polite gesture, which does nothing to stop germs from spreading.

My wife is very practical; she gets frustrated when I do not cover my sneezes.

"Either cover your face or don't do anything at all," she says. "And preferably cover your damn face!"
Sometimes she just rolls her eyes at the fact that I seem unable to break this bad habit. But other times my uncovered sneezes seem to symbolize everything about me that has required adjusting to in our marriage, and at these times, an improperly covered sneeze can affect her like gasoline sprayed on smoldering coals.

The morning before my final meeting with the investors was one of these times.

The weeks leading to this day, were also those nearing summer vacation, so my students were restless and hard to keep under control. I, too, was looking forward to the break, but would have a ton of marking to do beforehand. But my main anxiety was the investment. I would have sacrificed two years of my life to leap into the future, where hopefully the building would be showing a profit. As a result of this anxiety, I was not sleeping well, which made me scatter-brained.

Over the course of the three weeks before my final meeting, I said “I beg your pardon” to my wife about a hundred and fifty times, as whenever she spoke to me, my mind was distracted by the investment. Whether this was a good excuse or not, my not listening aggravates my wife. A teacher also, she had contributed to the money we were investing, but she handled the stress better than I. She, however, did not very well endure the fact that I was not handling the stress.

The morning before my final meeting with the investors I sneezed in front of my wife. Although she knew that just before the meeting was not the best time to bicker with me, I suppose she had reached her limit in terms of tolerating me and she was prepared to make a mistake.

We were sitting at the kitchen table, eating breakfast.
"Please cover your mouth when you do that," she said, with lowered eyes, but then, with raised voice and glaring at me, she said,

"I don't want to have to tell you again!"

We fought.

I argued that, on the morning I was to meet potential investors, she was nuts to criticize something so trivial as my sneezing.

She argued that looking after the building would make a zombie of me.

"I never cared if we got the investment in the first place," she also said. "And maybe you should grow up and realize you're a school teacher, not a real estate investor."

Personally, when I go out into the world, I like to think my wife is rooting for me. But she and I parted on unfriendly terms that morning. I would have preferred to have parted on good terms. I was on my way to deal with the investors. My wife having just told me to grow up, I felt so lonely that I felt like returning to demand she take it back. But this would have been ridiculous.

So I phoned her from a pay-phone outside the building the investors were in.

"I'm going in now," I told her.

"Good luck," she said encouragingly, having changed her mood for my sake, as I had hoped she would. "It was a stupid time to bicker with you. The stress of the investment is getting to both of us. Once we get it, we will be more relaxed; between the two of us we can look after the building without unbearable hassle; the plan is good and worth it, if we can retire early."
We said good-bye and I went through the big glass doors, on the way to the meeting.

The name of one of the investors is Allen Gray. He seems to hold the most weight regarding decisions. During the meeting, he was sitting to my right. I sneezed, and bringing my fist only half way to my mouth, I sprayed Allen Gray. One drop that landed on his lip, he had to wipe off with his hand.

I was very nervous. Yet, for a brief instant, the irony of my spray being on Allan Gray’s lip just after I had argued with my wife about my bad sneezing habits upstaged my concern regarding the investor’s opinion of me. I smirked at the irony.

The corners of my lips only went up a millimeter and only a hardly audible puff of laughter came out my nose and the look of humour on my face was instantly replaced with apprehension. Yet the investors saw that, for some reason, I found my spit on Allen Gray’s lip amusing.

I think, if I had apologized before the smirk, I would have been forgiven.

“My apologies Mr. Gray,” I should have said. “My wife is always after me to cover my face when I sneeze; I should listen to her on that.”

This would have been genuine. But after having expressed amusement, apologizing like this would have been difficult.

I searched my mind for what to say. I felt as if I should lower my eyes like a school boy being scolded for acting up. But this would not do. Momentarily I froze. I
suppose I should have just explained the irony regarding the fight I had with my wife. Perhaps this is what I was going to do.

But Clark began to speak, sort of coming to my rescue. Had I had a few more seconds, however, I might have performed an apology, so Clark also sort of ruined me. Allen Gray looked disgusted with me now. Going back to apologizing after Clark had spoken, I would obviously have been motivated by Allen Gray's disgust.

During the remaining forty-five minutes, he showed little interest in me. When speaking, he seemed to be just going through the motions of ending the meeting. Although we all were talking figures, we knew I had blown the deal by not apologizing for my sneeze. It was embarrassing how absolute the change was.

The investors must have been very undecided to let an uncovered sneeze influence their decision. As I had suspected, it appeared they doubted whether I could see my plan through successfully. I was put off by this.

I considered, however, that maybe they felt, if I was willing to risk one of them catching a cold from me, I would be equally careless with their money. Or perhaps they thought anyone who was amused by his spit being on another person's lip would not be considerate enough to keep paying renters satisfied.

But the reason I had laughed was that it was ironic my wife had gotten angry with me that very morning for not covering my sneezes. I wanted to apologize to Allen Gray. When the meeting was over, it seemed there might be a chance: I thought it might seem as if I had been waiting for the serious talk to end before I said sorry.
“We’ll meet you in about forty-five minutes with the decision,” Clark said to me, as the meeting came to a close.

“OK,” I said. Then I turned to Allen Gray.

“Sorry for sneezing on you, Allen,”

“That’s all right,” he said, sort of pleasantly to my surprise.

I thought I might have been wrong to think the sneeze had had such a deciding effect.

I continued.

“But Allen Gray cut me off.

“I said it’s OK,” he said impatiently, apparently not as genial as he had just appeared.

“Oh,” I said hesitantly.

Everyone had seen him talk down to me; they were looking at me. I was embarrassed. This passive emotion changed to anger. For some malignant reason, another sneeze developed in me. I stepped two long strides toward Allen Gray and sneezed in his face. Water droplets covered his cheeks and lips. He just stared at me, his mouth agape with shock. The other three investors also stared in shock. I, too, was stunned. My mind was blank; I picked up my briefcase and walked out.

Postponing a judgement of what had just happened, I walked to the elevator, went down, exited the building, and went to my car. I sat in it and thought about the incident.

“I wish I hadn’t done that,” I decided.
THE HUMAN

Please imagine you’ve read my story and it’s seven in the morning. Mist is floating. You’re by yourself on the number five green of a golf course. Although I actually don’t often play the game, you notice me four hundred yards behind you, hacking my way up the fairway.

Having read my story, I think that, to avoid me, you would scurry to the next tee, but that, if you were with one or two others, then to amuse yourselves, you might slow down and join me. You would notice that I have a bizarre way of addressing the ball, or something like that. Although we would continue over these manicured fields and keep trying to get it in the hole, you and your friends might sneak glances regarding my strange manner of play. I’m guessing this would be as good as life gets.

After some of what follows, I have felt inclined to apologize, and I have. Desire probably caused these things about which I seem to feel guilty; but if my desire had fangs, so to speak, I was not the chiseler. So I’m unsure if I mean my apologies.

Please be warned that, although I may, occasionally, seem repentant, the feeling hardly lasted longer than the time I took to express it. Perhaps, at best, I am apologizing on behalf of The Creator who concocted me.

A blacksmith, I enjoyed twisting burning metal. I made things like lamps. After creating, say, five of them, I would reach for another steel rod, and it would look like something buried in weeds beside an abandoned barn. I would put it over the fire and
work on it until it was another lamp. I don’t think I needed people as much as others. At least at first.

When I was twenty-six, I moved to a small town called Banerm, started a shop, distributed my products nationally, and earned forty thousand a year. I think small-town entrepreneurs, professionals, and employees usually have to worry about what their fellow townspeople think of them. But since I did not rely on the Banermites to buy my wares, if they withheld their patronage from me, my income would have dropped only about five hundred dollars annually. I was free not to worry about my reputation.

I think the five thousand people who lived in Banerm thought, at first, that I was a misfit, not a maniac. But now I feel that, even then, I might have been badly demented. I believe this consisted of things I didn’t do.

Before I explain, please let me say that I thought it interesting to articulate, compare, and debate the excellence of great athletes. However, in my demented state I felt that people were often obsessed with sports in a way which was incongruent with reality; not that I knew what reality was. In a word, I thought that many fans were too enthusiastic.

Furthermore, although I felt that athletes display breathtaking skill, I thought that a large part of the intrigue of sports had to do with wondering about the outcome. I speculated if, instead, we might create a few events in which only what was happening in the instant was fascinating.

I thought such an event would have to be weird. I tried, for example, to imagine
how the Banermites would feel, gathering in the stands of an arena, and not watching a
sport, but doing “the wave” and chanting. Although I predicted that deciding on the chant
would cause debate, I thought that, perhaps, we could just voice the word “Banerm,” and
that this would foster community spirit. I imagined Coke sponsoring the event, and
thereby giving it credibility.

Secondly, insofar as I wanted my hard earned tax money justly spent, politics
concerned me. But the government mystified me. Having seen people flounder at splitting
the cost of a pizza, I would not have been surprised if the government actually was as
chaotic as it appeared to me.

The campaign speech that would have gotten my vote would have been as
follows:

“Although I may have started off an OK person, being selfish is how I got where I
am now. Furthermore, along the way a lot of selfish people helped me, hoping to gain
from my success, and a lot of your tax money is going to go to them, and their friends.”

“If you knew the money up for grabs in this racket, you would understand our
greed. You’ve seen how excited we get when we win elections: you think it’s because we
want to help you slobs?”

“But I will take ten million dollars of your money and establish an institute to
research how to keep the likes of me out of power. Thank you.”

Lastly, please allow me to tell, quickly, about a four-year-old I once knew, named
Jason.

When I was sixteen, and had a Harley, Jason lived next to me. He was so fascinated by my bike that, in April, he asked each day if I was going to take it out of winter storage and roar it up. But much to his frustration, I did not share his intense enthusiasm. I let several nice days pass when I did not bother.

Finally, as yet another good day was passing and my Harley was still yet to be seen, Jason approached me and, with consternation, marveled, "Why don't you have your bike out on this beautiful day?"

For Jason's sake, I took it out; but I mention him for the following reason.

Since he was just four, he seemed incongruous referring to the weather. It were as though, in trying to manipulate me to take out the bike, he was trying to relate to me in adult terms. Even though I was only sixteen, I envied that he had such youthful vitality; he seemed strange acknowledging something so obvious and routine as the weather.

Here are just a few things I didn't do.

I rarely talked about sports, politics, or the weather.

I had a beard and didn't trim it.

I didn't pretend surprise at stories I had heard before, or politely laugh at things I didn't find funny; nor, if I was sitting with a bunch of guys and wanted to go, would I make an excuse for leaving: I would just leave.

Often, when I saw people discuss things, they talked about the same topics. These topics were socially accepted. Paranoid of insincerity, I felt this acceptableness was all
that motivated the discussion of these subjects. Forty to fifty times, when I was talking to someone and offering conversation, I stopped.

"I just realized I'm not interested in this," I'd say.

But having no clue what did interest me, I never added, "let's change the subject."

Usually, the other person got insulted.

"Have you got something better to talk about?"

"No. But at least I'm willing to admit it," I always replied.

Here's a longer example of the way I was.

Banerm has a pub, called The Triangle, and one Wednesday at seven PM, five guys I knew, were there. They were between the ages of thirty and thirty-five. Although for an hour and a half, I had been enjoying talking with them, I decided I had had enough. I stood.

"See you later," I said, decidedly.

I suppose, if five guys are at a bar and have had three beers, they'll have three more if they hang around long enough. But if one leaves, another might think, "I guess I should be off too." Then the festive mood may spoil.

The guy next to me was Clark.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" he demanded.

All of them looked at me. I had experienced this before.

"I'm going because I'm going."

One of the other fellows, Jerry, said, "He must have a woman waiting for him."
Having often hung out with the Banermite men, I knew most of them would have replied, "I wish."

But I said, "Actually I don't."

I think they wondered, suspiciously, "What's he saying?"

There was awkward silence.

Another guy, Alex, who I had met a year before, and through whom I had met the others, said "You went on a date with Grace Proctor a couple of weeks ago, didn't you?"

I'll explain how I responded; but I should tell about Grace first.

Grace had been twenty-two, and I twenty-seven. She studied political science at University in the city. I think she planned to hold a political office someday, and to marry a guy similarly inclined. We young Banermite men thought she was the most beautiful woman in town. We also assumed she was innocent, so to speak.

Whereas she was the sort used to guys smelling of Polo after-shave, I often smelled of BO and I had blackheads on my nose. Nevertheless, a shaggy bearded young man, I used to fantasize about her, if you know what I mean? I apologize.

I only had lived in Banerm a year, and most of this time, Grace had been away studying; but since Banerm is small, and she sometimes came home to visit, she knew of me, and I knew of her. One evening, when she was home for Christmas, I saw her selecting cards.

I knew she was not my type, so I felt that, if she rejected me, I would take it in stride. Also, since I assumed she was used to guys beating around the bush, so to speak, I
thought I would be forthright with her. I introduced myself.

"This summer, I saw you once or twice," I said. "I think you're attractive as hell. Would you like to go to dinner sometime?"

Since I was indeed attracted to her, I easily was able to affect a sincere disposition as I told her so. Perhaps this intrigued her.

She hesitantly said, "OK."

Upon my calling the next day, we arranged to dine the following evening, four days before Christmas. The next night, I arrived at her house at six, as we had planned. She opened the door and she was wearing tight red pants and a green sweater. She looked good. But she appeared irked. She frowned at me. Upon pondering this, I realized she had expected I would trim my beard for the date. As I never would trim my beard for such a reason, I was startled she thought I would.

She said, in a hoity-toity manner, "We're decorating," as if the whole town should know and now could do the same.

I supposed that she was talking about their Christmas tree; but her house was so big that, standing in the entrance, I couldn't see the tree. I didn't feel that I was being invited to adorn it, nor that she intended to continue decorating it. I suspected that she had mentioned it to indicate she hadn't been counting the seconds, anticipating my arrival; that our date was no big deal to her.

This irritated me. But I was a young man.

"Shall we go?" I said.

Since I can't remember what we spoke of while driving, perhaps her beauty
swayed me to talk of things not I, nor anyone, really cared about. I do remember, though, that she was not supporting her end of the conversation, which further irritated me. Seeing as I usually shunned "small talk," I suppose I was hypocritical.

I know, however, that, if I had been talking about the weather, I would have respected her aloofness, so I at least wasn’t talking about that.

Perhaps her beauty also encouraged me to stay optimistic.

"Which restaurant should we go to?" I asked.

As if having already decided the date was something to be politely endured, she looked out her window and replied, "Anywhere is fine."

She was reticent. In the restaurant, The Top Hat, she continued this.

Through the speakers, Frank Sinatra was playing "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas." I suppose I goaded her:

"At his concerts, young women used to faint in the aisles," I said. "Could you see yourself doing something like that?"

As if, provided she didn’t have to exert herself, she was resolved to tolerate me, she informed me, "I've never bothered to think about it."

"I like his voice," I said.

She said, "Mm mm."

"I prefer Elvis, though. I've seen videos of him, and I think there really was something about the way he shook his hips."

"Hm."
Although I now feel I was demented, back then I wasn’t the sort to stomach even this slight amount of head-gaming, so to speak.

I thought, “Here’s her last chance.”

“I’ll bet political science has advanced a lot since those days,” I said. “You know of any interesting new theories?”

Grace pondered a second.

“Not at Christmas,” she jested.

I surmised she knew I was aware that she was more interested in "boy next door" types than me, who made steel ornaments and wore a shaggy beard. I concluded that she had agreed to dine with me only so that she could tease me and inflate her ego. I suspected she purposefully was making me choose whether to act so as to please her or be myself; that she was testing if her beauty would sway me; that she was slighting me to see how many times her photogenic mug would arouse me to try charming her; that, while I was aroused imagining I might untame her, she wanted to be amused by using my desire for her to enchant me into begging her to like me.

Although I thought she eventually would cooperate enough to carry conversation, I predicted she would snub me once or twice more to make me earn this privilege. I was stubborn. I decided that, unless she initiated it, I no longer would talk.

Over the next thirty-five minutes, she didn't speak either. Other than when we ordered, all we did was wait, act indifferently, fork in food, chew, swallow, and scoop more food. Since we appeared focused only on satisfying our appetites, I felt we were behaving wildly, that I was being myself. So I wasn’t intimidated.
As for her, she looked determined and seemed to think she also was being true to herself, which irked me. But I, nonetheless, was enjoying the ordeal.

After thirty-five minutes, when we had cleared our plates, we were sitting silently. The waiter came and asked if we wanted dessert. By this time, I had thought of a bad one. I apologized.

"I'll have a bowl of vanilla ice cream," I said, affecting a cosy manner. "Grace, would you like anything?"

I saw that my prolonging the meal surprised her. But she regained her veiled manner.

"No thank you," she said.

Having thought as much, I explained, "When we leave, you can go home and tinsel your tree. Meanwhile, maybe it will start snowing. I think that, if you don't get a piece of cherry pie, you'll be missing out on something."

Grace did the friendliest thing yet. She stared at me.

I continued, "I doubt you're concerned eating pie with me will become a habit. Might I be so bold as to order some for you."

She eyed me suspiciously, but to my surprise, she acquiesced; she slightly nodded to the waiter, indicating he could bring the pie. He left.

"Good nod," I said.

This angered her it seemed.

Now, Nat King Cole was playing.

"I like Nat King Cole," I said.
Grace offered another stare.

"Yes, she said, "He sings nicely."

This enthusiasm perplexed me. Upon thinking about it, I concluded she assumed that just replying to me once, in this positive tone, would start me aspiring to charm her again. I suppose I hoped that she would be intrigued, instead, was content to recline within a warm Christmas glow. I apologize.

Waiting for dessert, I listened to the music and sometimes softly smiled at Grace. Desert came: I didn’t even ask, but was gentle: to her surprise, I reached across the table and spooned ice cream on her pie.

Again, I apologize. I really do.

After enjoying dessert, paying the bill, and leaving, we drove toward her house. She preserved an ambivalent disposition, which prevented me from knowing if she hated me or might tolerate me. I pulled into her driveway and put my van in park.

Grace was so beautiful I couldn’t resist her.

"Should I call you again?" I asked.

She thought a few seconds and I was shocked she would consider it. Gazing at me, she appeared willing. I got excited.

But she was tricking me, getting the last jab.

She said politely, "I guess I just don’t need that sort of behavior. Sorry."

I was groin-broken.

"What sort of behavior?" I pleaded, as she got out and shut the door.

She walked around the front of my van and into her house.
“I've got her number,” I thought. “I'll call tomorrow night.”

But I later decided I shouldn't, and mustering some willpower, I didn't.

Now I was in the Triangle.

Another guy there, Wayne, exclaimed, “You're dating Grace Proctor?”

“We didn't get along.”

Amazed I would allow myself not to get along with such a beautiful woman, he demanded, “Why not???”

“Lately, I haven't had much luck with any women.”

Again there was awkward silence.

The bartender, Mitch, was about fifty.

“There's not a guy here who hasn't been in the same boat,” he said. “You keep being yourself, even around a woman like Grace Proctor.”

I thought about this. The guys saw that I became concerned.

“If I were myself, I would have arrived at her house naked.”

I did not feel obliged to be a misfit, but I thought the Banermites appreciated it.

Although, men generally were more good humored toward me than women. I speculated that the females felt responsible for maintaining order in Banerm, and since I didn't conform, they punished me, so as to deter other men from breaking rank. Many of the Banermite women denied me “Hello”’s.
Since I sometimes caught them peeking at me though, I wondered if they secretly desired me. Perhaps they feared voicing a "how are you today?" might reveal this. I think, intuiting I suspected they yearned for me, they were infuriated with me. On the street, they sometimes would pass close and snub me, so as to make certain I knew they were ignoring me. But this further convinced me of their interest. I imagined that after bending to me, however, they would insist on having me shot.

Some women, of a wilder nature, divulged that they wanted me, glaring almost threateningly, as if to say, "Yes, you stupid male, I might desire you." Some might have attracted any man, no matter how well adjusted. On, off, and over-lapping, I befriended three. But since I generally liked to deviate more than even they preferred (In light of what follows, to elaborate would be superfluous), I felt not totally myself with them. They often scolded me. I usually obeyed though, so I could enjoy being gentle and treated softly, as I am inclined to do only with women.

In downtown Banerm there were offices, which were vacuumed nightly, and occupied by professionals in the day. But the surrounding area was wilderness. If from Main Street, a Banermite drove five minutes, he or she could walk in woods so wild a bear might attack. The wind would whisper. This forest always reminded me that social conventions, such as suits, ties, high heels, bras, and good manners, don't develop in the womb, nor grow from earth. I think many Banermite men have stood in these woods.

Perhaps the usual way of snaring a livelihood these days is to be shackled to earning profit for someone smarter or luckier than you, or by being someone you rather
would not be. I think many Banermite men have often thought that chopping trees, building a cabin, and killing animals might feel better. I imagined that, sometimes when they were handed their paychecks, a wild but conquered part of them brewed over the fact that their front teeth were still sharp enough to tear raw meat.

I was the type of blacksmith who just made ornaments. But I nonetheless banged on an anvil, scattered sparks, wrestled and mastered steel, and people, who I never saw, wanted my products. I think my manner of being echoed those times when, once a young man had outsmarted wild animals, he answered only to himself. I think that in the eyes of the Banermite men, I was macho as hell.

When hailing each other, they often seemed to bolster each other’s egos. At the Triangle, if a man walked in, another sitting at the bar would offer something like, "there he is," or "hi big guy," or "what's going on, Chief?" Sometimes I wondered if, in boosting the pride of someone else, they were trying to convince themselves of their own self-esteem.

I think that, acknowledging me, none felt they could pretend to be more assured than I, such that they should reach down and pull me up, so to speak. One night at the Triangle a bartender named Larry was working, and a regular, Merv, had been drinking a lot. I walked in.

"What’s going on, Champ?" Merv said to me.

“That proves it. You’re cut off,” Larry said.

Usually upon walking in, I felt the men watching, perhaps to see if something, which had been suffocated in them, still was breathing in me. I sensed I mystified them.
They seemed to be cautious around me. They acted friendly, but sort of neutral.

They would say, “Hello,” and always my name.

However, I was stranger than they knew, which I eventually exposed. One thing I did is particularly embarrassing. Two other strange incidents preceded it. I will tell about them in order to elucidate my state of mind when I did the third thing.

One summer day, while I was working in my shop, the sun was beaming. My fire intensified this heat. Sweat dripped. Energy drained. Deciding to cool myself, I drove off in my van and returned with a bag of ice. In the back of my shop, I had rubber boots, which I put on. I filled them with water and added the cubes. Coolness circulated.

Two afternoons later, when the sun again shone hot and I was mowing my lawn, I had again filled my boots.

Two weeks later, the weather was cool. It was evening. Having been standing all day, my feet were sore, and I wanted to soak them. But I also desired to go for a jaunt. I got my boots and filled them with water and Epsom salts.

At this time, I lived in Banerm County, and a dirt road ran in front of my house. Wearing the boots, I took a stroll.

I had a neighbour, Bernard, and he drove along. He stopped. We chatted. As I stood, occasionally shifting my weight, the water squished and squashed.

Bernard and I talked. He was about to leave.

“What are you wearing?” he asked.

“I get bored soaking my feet sitting. I put water and Epsom salts in my boots.”
Hearing this, Bernard cackled so hard tears flowed.

"That's a strange one. That's weird all right. You take care," he chuckled. He drove off, still chuckling.

I looked down at my boots.

I thought, "Bernard's an imbecile."

I began strolling again; but feeling self-conscious, I regarded the squishing and squashing. I stopped. I again pondered the boots. Clarity flashed.

"I'm eccentric," I realized.

Heretofore, although I had been genuinely loathful to uphold common social nuances, and sincerely pleased to neglect them, I always had been aware of behaving in this singular manner, so given that life is hard to predict, I had allowed that someday I might conform. But realizing I had filled my boots with water and Epsom salt, without thinking it odd, I now was convinced strangeness permanently abounded within me.

I had an eccentric predisposition that, on its own accord, had actualized itself. I felt privileged. Maybe I would have preferred being prone to be a great athlete or such, but nonetheless, discovering water filled rubber boots on my feet, I was pleased.

A month later, my mind germinated an idea for a coat rack, which uniquely combined decor and practicality. The next two days, taking the occasional nap, I worked around the clock, settling on the design and methods for making the new product. I was in
the bathroom at unusually late hours.

On the third night, I stayed home and went to sleep at a regular time. Upon
dreaming I was back in my shop, answering nature's call, I awoke to wet sheets around
my lower regions.

Two days later in The Triangle, I was in the men's room. I was wondering if I was
dreaming again.

"I definitely am awake," I thought.

I began.

Awakening in my bed a second later, I was shocked. Luckily though, since I had
awoken so quickly, my sheets were still dry.

I think this relates to another incident, which happened a week later. The time was
two in the afternoon. I had just left the print shop that supplies my mail order brochures. I
was walking one road over from Main Street Banerm. People were driving by, and others
were walking on the sidewalk. In total, about forty people were around me. I was feeling
the need, and I saw a big elm on a lawn.

"What the heck," I thought.

Upon walking to the elm, I began.

Clarity flashed.

"What am I doing!?" I thought.

I looked around and saw that several people had noticed. They seemed appalled. I
felt self conscious.

"I'll cut it short," I thought.
But this is hard. Despite feeling awkward, I continued until finished.

As I was zipping up, a cop, who had pulled over, approached me on foot. I didn’t want to spend the afternoon in the drunk tank, especially since I was sober.

“My apologies,” I said. “I momentarily forgot that people don’t do this in public. Then as you might understand, I would have found it uncomfortable to stop. I apologize and guarantee I’ll never do it again.”

As I said the last of these words, I began walking away. The cop stared after me, but bewildered perhaps, he didn’t pursue.

I noted to myself, “I mustn’t do that.”

Since people in Banerm were generally curious about me, word spread about this mishap, and about the fact that I had worn water filled rubber boots. The way the Banermite men started looking at me, I think they concluded I was crackers, and they no longer wondered if they should envy me.

Some seemed to infer I was to be belittled.

At this time, I wasn’t seeing a woman; but hoping to find one, I stopped in at The Triangle twice a week. I had no success during this period. I always ended up sitting with men and listening to them discuss sports and politics.

One night, when they were talking about the upcoming Stanley Cup Playoffs, one of them, Sam, asked me, “Who do you go for?”

“I enjoy a close series,” I replied. “But I don’t root for a particular team.”

Seeming as if he could relate but disapproved, Sam immediately had something
better to say to one of the others fellows.

I had drunk a beer, which was wanting to complete its journey.

"Pardon me," I said.

Standing, I started toward the can.

But when I was ten feet away, Sam bellowed, "If you'd prefer, there's a tree out
back."

I stopped and turned. They were silently giggling, awaiting my response.

Since I was not much ashamed of the tree incident, maybe this was why I didn't
laugh at Sam's remark. But neither was I angered; I lacked a reply.

Sam smirked.

"I'm just teasing ya," he said, jovially.

For two seconds, I was silent. Then,

"Yeah," I chuckled.

Turning, I continued to the bathroom.

In there, I thought about my life. I decided that twisting metal was not fulfilling
me; that boredom was why I was at The Triangle, but that, here, I was very bored, and
that, even though working in my shop didn't completely satisfy me, it was better than
this.

The time was eight o'clock, and I already had worked ten hours. Nevertheless, I
decided to go back to my shop for two or three more. I exited the bathroom.

"See you later," I said, decidedly.

For five months, I never returned, after which there were infrequent times when I
did need to chum with my fellow man, and for an hour or so, I dropped in.

Over the years, I have had three recurring dreams. I think they vaguely relate to my life.

In one, I'm fifteen, about to go somewhere to be circumcised. (In real life I'm uncircumcised.) I'm in my parents living room and I'm facing Mom, Dad, and an African Black man, who is wearing a wooden mask. I somehow know I can forgo the ordeal by going downtown, stepping onto a podium, and making a speech. So I'm not worried. That's where I go.

Downtown, a crowd of a five hundred has gathered. Upon ascending the podium, I look at the people and wait until they silence.

"I don't know why I exist!!" I declare.

After contemplating this, the crowd concludes that, although I think I am profound, I have declared the obvious. They join in laughing at me and rolling their eyes, some keeling over in hysterics, others waving me good riddance, turning their backs, and walking away.

Somehow my parents stand among them. My mother starts crying, her hands covering her face. My father is so embarrassed by me that he avoids meeting my eyes.

On my left, a gray haired man in a suit approaches. He looks authoritative.

"Do I have to be circumcised?" I ask him.

"No. You don't," he says, as if congratulating me.

We shake. My hand feels good in his.
In my second dream, I am nineteen, and two guys, slightly older, knock at my parent’s door. Their hair is short and neatly combed; they are wearing gray slacks, white shirts, and blue ties. Around each of their waists, a love handle hangs, as if from being fed too much home-made bread. They look like Mormons. They are twins.

Nervously, the one on the left declares, “What goes around, comes around.”

Still nervous, he waits.

His twin, whom this declaration has made frustrated and angry, rebukes, “Not always, God-damn-it,” as if, many times before, they have disagreed about this.

As they look at me to respond, I don’t know what to say. I’m not angry; but I slam the door on them.

When I was twenty-eight, I had a black van, and in my third dream, I’m driving it. I am in a strange town, not far from Banerm, but one I never before had visited. I pull into a gas station. After filling my tank, I go in to pay.

Part of the garage is a convenience store with an apartment on top. I notice, on the window, two signs are taped up. One says "clerk wanted," the other, "room for rent."

Inside, no one is behind the counter. I look around. Upon seeing the door leading above, I open it. I ascend. In a living-room at the end of a hall, is a mother, a father, and their son, all watching t.v. In the hall is the door to the room. I walk down the hall. I enter the room. But realizing that, unannounced, I am in a stranger’s house, I become apprehensive. I quietly shut the door. Inside is a bed, blankets, clothes in the closet, and pictures on the wall. It seems lived in; yet I feel that, from now on, I will be staying in this
room.

Outside the door, I hear the father's quiet footsteps.

"Are you going to work in the store?" he asks, as if he assumes the answer is "yes," but is confused and curious.

Although also confused, I answer meekly, "yeah."

The dream about the Mormons got me thinking about an idea which led to the third strange thing I did. As I explained, I find it embarrassing. I knew I was acting nuts; but I was unaware I really was nuts to act this nuts. I was like a dangerously obese person enjoying the fact that he enjoys food.

I began thinking that, if someone came to my door and declared "Life is weird," I would appreciate the gesture. Furthermore, I expected that, if I surveyed the Banermites and asked if they found life weird, most would say "yes." I found the Banermites tense. I thought that, if in the Banerm Gazette, I published the results of such a survey, this revelation might help them loosen up.

I imagined I would have to go to people's houses around dinner, when folks were home. I felt that advancing on peoples' abodes at this time would be like approaching their ids. Furthermore, Banerm being small, they already would know me to be odd. My question also would be odd. I thought that, perhaps, they would be quick to dislike someone odd and, thereby, confirm that "normal" is better.

I also thought they might think I was mocking them; or that I was being so
forthright that I was making myself vulnerable to ridicule and needed a slap in the head. I discovered I feared people, which surprised me. I decided to try eradicating it.

Banerm supported a high school basketball team, "The Banermighters," and about seven hundred Banermites usually came out to cheer for them. I decided to sit among them and endeavour to dart onto the court, snatch the ball, and bounce it to the ceiling, most likely when play had been stopped, so as not to influence the score.

Let me remind you that I bent steel for a living. I think this might have given me demented confidence that I could determine the shape of things, so to speak.

As I also mentioned earlier, I appreciated sports, so I enjoyed watching the Banermighters. Furthermore, the fans were boisterous, which exhilarated me.

Attending these games, I thought about the fact that fans of basketball, football, hockey, and such are more emotional than those of sports like tennis, golf, and snooker. Obviously, the reason is that the former are team sports. As people say, there is such a thing as "team spirit." This term struck me as appropriate, and the reason has to do with rainbows, which to me are the most miraculous occurrence.

As I say, bending steel gave me excessive confidence. One day I tried figuring out God.

Although there was no rainbow, I said to myself, "To start thinking about God, look to the most miraculous thing."

I thought about the fact that a rainbow happens when light divides; that on one side of the prism formed by water droplets there is unified white light, and on the other
are the separate colors, the rainbow.

I speculated that God is similar. I imagined that death is like the prism; that on our side, everything is separated, which is life as we see it; but that, on the other side, everything which ever has, will, or could exist is unified, and that this is God.

This made sense to me for the following reasoning. When I was a young man, I thought that, if someone were telling me how to be, I would go nuts. I didn't want a boss, which was one of the reasons I became a blacksmith. But even though I achieved financial independence and could act and think as I pleased, I still had to concede that I was not totally autonomous; that I had not created myself, but had been created by God, the earth, or whatever you want to call it.

Furthermore, I thought that, if someone said to me, “Who are you?” I would have to concede that I am more than a blacksmith, more than my name, and so on; so I can't say who I am. My Creator had left me a mystery to myself.

Since I liked to feel I mastered myself, thinking this should have driven me nuts; but it didn't. I concluded that the only way I could take this lack of identity in stride is if I had created myself; in other words, if part of me is God. I decided that, if someone were to ask me who I was, the honest answer would be, “I am God, but a minuscule part with imperfections.”

I further thought that, if one person is part of God, then when people unify, they must resemble God more, which perhaps is what inspires things like marriage and team spirit.

Having the inflated and demented confidence of a steel bender, I thought a greater
sense of unity could be achieved than that amongst fans at sports events. I envisioned the world making use of radios to have an international drum day. I imagined that, once a year for twenty minutes, we all could come out and beat something to the same rhythm, or clap. I was intrigued that it would be so easy that everyone could partake, and all would have an equal role, as opposed to passively watching music stars, famous actors and actresses, great athletes, and political and religious leaders.

Moreover, via radio, the world drumming could be synchronized, which I thought would very directly generate international harmony. I imagined it would be particularly profound if we all stopped on the same beat, and for a minute, observed silence.

As I say, though, I feel I might have been demented in those days. Rethinking these elated ideas chills me.

I supposed that, by bouncing the basketball as I had planned, I would be expressing that I thought life to be weirder than this sports event suggested. But I also realized that, after bouncing it once, there would be no point doing it a second time. So only for a few seconds would I be interesting to stare at; then the game would resume. I supposed that, for arresting people’s attention, but having no reason they should sustain their curiosity, they would find me irritating.

Also, I knew that by bouncing the ball I would be doing something anyone could do, and that the Banermites were used to someone doing something very skillful, noble, or evil before receiving attention. So I thought they might feel I was drawing attention to myself in a cheap way.
I also knew I someday was going to die. I supposed that I would be affirming I
was alive and also making others acknowledge this fact. I supposed, too, that, in
affirming I was alive, I would be acknowledging that I someday was going to die, and
reminding others of their impending doom. Since the Banermites were just trying to enjoy
a basketball game, I thought this might annoy them.

As far as I know, some people spend their evenings and weekends doing things
like being girl and boy scoutmasters, or refereeing sports games. This sort of life seems to
satisfy them. These people mystify and frighten me. One of the referees for the
Banermighters struck me as this type.

As I sat in the stands, imagining that, in the next instant, I would run and bounce
that ball, a glow would ignite my cheeks, my temples would throb, and I would sweat.
After attending five games, I still had failed to seize the moment.

Some people sat in the same seat week after week, so if I wanted, I always could
sit next to the same person. I decided that, if I focused on freaking out a particular
individual, I might be more motivated. I began sitting next to a father and his ten-year-old
son. I apologize.

I cheered with them. When the ball teetered and dropped on the outside of the
opponent’s rim, I groaned with them.

Often the players performed skillfully.

“That was a nice play,” I would agree.

When one night we walked out of the gym together, the father asked, “What do
you do for a living?”
“I'm a blacksmith.”

“You're the blacksmith. I didn't know you liked basketball.”

I planned that, on the night I stole the show, I would return beside him.

“I sure like bouncing that ball,” I would say. “Gets a little boring just watching.”

After Christmas, I started hearing talk about the finals; since this would draw a larger crowd, I decided to wait until then; but I still attended all the games to stay accustomed to the crowd.

The finals were in May. About eight hundred Banermites came out and cheered the Banermighters. I ran onto the floor and charged three-quarters of the way to the ball. But that referee looked at me. He seemed uninterested, as if, later, when he lay in bed, he would not ponder my performance, nor at breakfast, laugh about it with his wife. He looked as though he would resume the game as readily as, when the ball came down, he would catch it. He normalized me. I stopped. Bewildered, I gazed at him. Everyone was looking at me. I receded off the court and out of the gym. I went into the bathroom and sat on the toilet.

I read on the stall door, “I was here.” I thought it probably was written by a fourteen year old with his pants down, and that a fourteen-year-old with his pants down was likely as sincere as anyone.

People sometimes streak at public events, which perhaps is more daring than trying to bounce the ball; but in that gym were eight hundred people with whom I
inhabited a small town of five thousand. Furthermore, whereas I was twenty-nine, the players were in high school, and this added to how foolish I felt.

I realized, however, that after chickening out and making a fool of myself, if I went back and reseated myself, I would be more daring than if I had succeeded. I decided to try this stunt.

Since two police officers had been positioned at one of the entrances, I went to the opposite one. Now they stood a neither end, and I thought they may have been searching for me in the parking lot.

Planning to act nonchalant, I walked in. Hundreds of people turned and looked at me. I became embarrassed. But although I wanted to retreat, I realized that, being embarrassed, I was more challenged than if I felt composed. Furthermore, I knew that my face betrayed the emotion: I imagined that, if I forged on, people would wonder why I would humiliate myself like this. I would be a paradox to them. I decided I should force myself to walk the entire circumference. Mustering willpower, I began walking down the aisle.

At first, I felt fearful, as if this self-imposed journey into mayhem would scar me, perhaps just by virtue of it being self-imposed. But as I rounded the second corner, I started to feel free in a way. I took two deep breaths and looked up into the bleachers. Most of the spectators were staring at me, despite the game.

By the time I came to the last length of the court, I felt ten feet tall. I dared myself to walk so slowly that one might have had to look hard to see that I was moving at all. Creeping along like this, holding my foot in mid-air-stride, I started feigning
embarrassment, pretending, with a shy, downward facial expression, to be embarrassed, when I obviously was overconfident, taunting all those who could relate to embarrassment, which likely was everyone.

Even though I was not doing anything harmful or illegal, I felt I was affronting the norm so aggressively that the crowd would almost think it proper for someone to shoot me, or for everyone to beat me to a pulp.

When I reached the end of the lap, I stopped. I looked up into the bleachers for a seat. A blacksmith, I had large, hard biceps; but at the beginning of my performance, I had looked meek. So, thinking they could intimidate me, some of the Banermites looked hostile.

Standing there, I thought of what I had done. I found it funny and began laughing, but not as if to threaten. This may have threatened the Banermites. They withdrew their confronting glares. As they begrudgingly made way for me, I ascended the stands. I sat.

I said to the guy next to me, “What’s the score?”

Irritation on his face, he ignored me.

Later, when I walked amongst the Banermites exiting the gym, some fourteen-year-olds asked, “Why did you run onto the floor?”

I announced, “I was going to bounce the ball but chickened out.”

A man in front of me turned around.

“You’re fucked,” he scolded.

“Yes,” I chuckled, “life is weird.”
As for the survey I had imagined doing, I never went door to door. I made just one phone call.

I told the guy about the survey, and who I was.

"I just want to know if you find life weird?" I asked.

A good natured fellow, he laughed.

"Yes," he chuckled. "I wouldn't deny it can get a little weird."

Although I had thought my question would be straightforward, he was taking it too lightly.

Politely, I explained, "I can relate to you finding my question humorous, but I don't think you understand it. I'm wondering if you find life weird, as in so strange you hardly can take it?"

After I heard five seconds of silence, during which I thought he was thinking, he hung up.

I realized "weird" can mean many things to many people. I never did the survey.

As I said, although I knew I was acting odd, I was unaware I was behaving truly crazy. I recall that after this performance, some women, who had used to flirt with me at The Triangle, ignored me.

Around this time though, a woman named Lisa moved to Banerm. She opened a nail design parlor. A good friend of mine, Joe, spent some time with her. His account,
which follows, is how I first heard about her. She likely will seem strange and perhaps, comical to you; but in her behavior, one may recognize a nasty irony germinating.

Joe explained to me, "When I introduced myself to her at the Triangle, she was so easy to talk with that I knew I'd be able to get to know her; not that all conversational women are indiscriminate, but with some you feel that talking is leading somewhere."

"But for some reason, I felt she had one up on me, and as the night went on, I felt it more. We went to her place. I still felt it. I almost said, "What the hell is going on?" But she put on a fire, and sitting on her couch, we talked. It was nice. But after about ten minutes, she put her head on my chest, and that's when she did it.

"She asked, intimately, 'Do you like the fire, Daffy Duck?'"

As Joe told me this, I thought it was so nuts that I wondered if Lisa's soul clanked and sputtered similarly to mine. Joe continued,

"At first I thought she was joking, and I found it crazy as hell. But she looked panicked."

"'Sorry,' she said. 'I couldn't resist,' but in a phony way, like she wanted me to believe she was fooling, but actually wasn't.

"So I started thinking she really was fantasizing I was Daffy Duck, and when she saw I was thinking this, she turned embarrassed and awkward. I'm pretty sure she was fantasizing I was Daffy Duck."
Since Joe wasn’t the sort to ask personal questions, he hadn’t queried Lisa about her odd remark. But I thought he could read folks as well as anyone. I also didn’t consider him the sort to exaggerate to be interesting. Strange as the occurrence was, I believed him.

Around this time, I was speculating that evil inevitably flows through life. Thus, if people intended to be purely good and dam this current of sin, they would eventually transgress. Although guised as virtuous, destructive waves of hypocrisy would gush forth. I imagined this two-faced malevolence would cut deeper and spread wider than if a trickle of forthright naughtiness had been steadily released.

Put another way, I reasoned that, evil happens; but since society deplores it absolutely, it almost never happens in the name of evil, but rather, in the name of goodness. For reasons having to do with the following analogy, I thought this was bad.

If an alcoholic goes to an AA meeting, his first step is to say, “Hi. I’m an alcoholic.”

Similarly, I thought the human race should say, “Hi. As a whole, we’re a bunch of jerks.”

I, however, thought these two scenarios differ insofar as an alcoholic can be cured. I thought the best we could hope for would be truthfulness regarding the evil we commit. I speculated that, this way, we might be able to control evil, which we would not even attempt if we continued to do it in the name of goodness.

However, although I thought people should accept evil, I also felt that, afterwards, they should desire to repent. Furthermore, I speculated that, doing evil blatantly, as
opposed to hypocritically, one might repent more. I thought that, repentant, one might be
the least prone to harm others.

This is not to say I would have advised against deeds that were purely good. No, I
would have suggested one do them and not let one’s left hand know what the right is
doing, and the whole bit. However, I considered this sort of morality to be similar to a
drug on which one can overdose. I thought that, if one pursued too much of it, one would
start to feel one wasn’t being admired enough, or something like that, and a compressed
blast of hypocrisy would eventually gush forth, whereby one would become vengeful and
try to justify it somehow.

Assuming this sort of approach to life, I had imagined my ideal woman might be a
guard in a female prison, and that, when I occasionally misbehaved, she would be able to
contend with me.

On the other hand, I realized that, for Lisa to be infatuated with Daffy Duck, she
was insane. Also, to let this lunacy advance to the stage where she was saying his name
aloud, she must have permitted tremendous freedom within her mind. Furthermore,
normal men must not have satisfied her. Although she wasn’t a female prison guard, I
surmised she might be of the mold for which I was looking.

I assumed she wasn’t attracted to Daffy Duck physically. So I thought about what
defines his character. I decided he constantly frets, yet always ends up on the short end of
the stick. Also, he despises everyone and speaks comically. I reasoned that these qualities
attracted her.

Maybe I didn’t join the right clubs, subscribe to the right magazines, or maybe, I
was stupid. But whereas I wanted to live according to the fact that humanity exists, but
doesn't know why, I felt that my community, as a whole, only wondered if the mysterious
above would do what the five o'clock weather person predicted. I was frustrated with
people. In this way, I thought I resembled Daffy Duck.

As Joe had explained, Lisa was bashful about desiring Daffy. So I guessed she
knew it was weird. Yet, she obviously saw no real reason to resist the strange infatuation,
so I inferred she found life equally weird.

"My intimate friend," I imagined myself whispering to her. "You needn't be
bashful around me."

I thought it lucky that Joe had met Lisa and knew me well enough to realize I
would want to hear about her. I began to feel as if a large bell were ringing, announcing
my time to fall in love, as if God were uniting her and me.

Thinking God would pair the two of us, who acted so strangely, and alert me to
Lisa with the words "Do you like the fire Daffy?" made me feel as if God were winking at
me, sharing a joke, as if God liked me.

In high school, whenever I had thought someone in authority was pleased with
me, I had disliked the pressure of maintaining the approval so much that at the first
opportunity, I had purposefully disappointed him or her. I would have preferred not to
think God particularly liked me.

But this didn't lessen my enthusiasm. I imagined how far and strangely Lisa's
mind must have roamed to land where she yearned for a cartoon. When I repeated to
myself the words "do you like the fire Daffy?" and tried to imagine Lisa's state of mind
when she said them, they seemed to be one of those things people sometimes encounter, which originates from human thought and emotion, and is so unique it must be explained, lest those who know of it bear unsatisfied curiosity.

I imagined she desired him intensely, perhaps exclusively. I thought that, if my manner of being approximated his, she would desire me greatly. Since I felt that, for a long time, I had withstood being lonely on society’s fringes, I welcomed this chance at being enthusiastically appreciated. I called Joe.

"Throw a party and invite her," I said.

Joe earned his money driving a school bus, and on weekends, gratified himself by drinking moonshine. He lived in a trailer in the county. On Friday and Saturday nights, six to a dozen male and female friends of his would drop in, and in return for his home-brew, some would bring weed. About once every month and a half, I joined them.

Since I always could half way mollify myself by working in my shop, I was not desperate to feel fulfilled. Contrarily, Joe and his friends were weekend alcoholics who depended on booze and weed to occupy their free time. If I popped in too often, I eventually would find myself bored there. I would want to leave.

Yet I would feel that, if I shunned the affair, I would dry up the mood. Since Joe always received me, I felt I had no right to do so. So I would resign myself to staying. Thus, when I did feel like drinking and toking, all would welcome me. On these sacrificial nights, though, I would get drunk and vent some wickedness. Although this was not applauded, I'm sure it was more appreciated than if I abandoned ship.
Joe and his friends had been smoking dope regularly for twenty years. They handed around a joint with as much nonchalance as one passes butter. I think they feared they were consuming dope excessively. Perhaps acting indifferently while smoking it created a mood of naturalness which assuaged this concern.

To botch this delusion of theirs, sometimes, when I smoked up with them, I would act like a sixteen-year-old new to toking.

"Holy fuck I'm wired," I would say. "Are you guys as stoned as me?"

Joe and his buddies probably suspected I was trying to irritate them, but since I was guised in the excuse of rarely toking, they weren't sure. Furthermore, if they instructed me to act indifferently, this would have botched their own poses of dissimulation. They rarely rebuked me beyond ignoring me.

Once, however, one of them, Allen, got angry.

"Either you smoke or you don't. You know what I mean?"

Pestering him, I declared, "I have no idea what he's talking about? If he wants me to know what he means, why doesn't he say what he means?"

Allen turned his head back to the t.v.

"Forget it," he said.

Another way I tormented Joe and his buddies is, after I had drunk two beers, I sometimes said, as if celebrating the following theory: "I'm stupid enough to think that being ten-beer wasted is better than two-beer buzzed. That's why I'm enjoying this third one so much. Although, I'm sure I'll be disappointed."

One time, a regular, named Mitch, was going on about a Triumph motorbike he
was thinking of buying and repairing. For the last year and a half, every second time I went to Joe’s, Mitch put in time sharing this plan.

“That’s interesting,” I said to him. “You’re thirty-five now and you’ve been talking about this bike for fifteen months. Before that, you were talking about a boat. Personally, I’m not interested in bikes or boats, but I’m fascinated you might bullshit your whole life.”

Mitch was so mad he made no reply, but a half hour later, as I came out of Joe’s bathroom, he blackened my eye.

Inviting Lisa to a party at Joe’s was a matter of suggesting she drop in Saturday night.

Joe feared I might do something rude, like walk in and say to her, "Nice to meet you. What's this I hear about you and Daffy Duck?"

“You have to promise not to do anything stupid?” he warned me.

“Like what?”

“Do you promise or don’t you?”

“All right. All right.”

The night Lisa was to be at Joe’s, I arrived late, at around eleven. Before entering, I stood outside on his steps and looked through the window in his trailer door. About a dozen people were there. On the couch sat Lisa. I got excited.

A guy named Mark was talking to her, and she was nodding, looking politely
frustrated with life. I imagined that, if I were a woman, I would look the same.

“I believe she is the one for me,” I thought.

I was confident she would desire me. I felt valuable. I opened the door and entered.

“People are despicable,” I quacked in a Daffy voice. “How rude to start without me.”

Joe must have told Mark that Lisa was infatuated with Daffy, and Mark must have told Rachel and Shelly, who were sitting next to Lisa. All got abashed looks on their faces. Someone in the kitchen to my left must also have known, but for him, the brazenness of my entrance took a second to register. I heard a delayed guffaw from there. Lisa stared at me.

I had exposed poor Joe as blabbermouth. Lisa must also have wondered if he was a sinister prankster who had invited her to his trailer, knowing I would enter like this. From where he was sitting in a chair across from her, he stood, lunged toward me, and swung at my head. I slipped the punch, but by attacking me, he had communicated to Lisa that he disapproved of my entrance.

“You’re a neanderthal,” I quacked, struggling with him. “Totally uncivilized!!”

I clutched him in a bear hug from behind.

“I know when I’m not wanted,” I quacked sarcastically. “I’m going to the Triangle.”

I shoved him into the living room area. I waddled mockingly out the door.
Before entering the trailer, I'd intended to speak like Daffy.

Even though I'd stayed inside only for a minute, Lisa had seemed to want me so badly that the intensity of her leer had startled me. It also had seemed to inspire me: I'd become Daffy more convincingly than I had predicted. Now, standing outside, I was awestruck by this transformation.

Lisa has since told me how she felt after I left.

"That very night, I wanted to go to the Triangle and take you home," she said. "But I was aware that a handful of people at Joe's, who knew I desired Daffy, were wondering if I would follow you. I guess I was embarrassed. I thought that maybe I could lie and say I was going home, but I realized they might be so curious that, shortly after I left, they might go to The Triangle to see if I'd pursued you. I decided to let them know, subtly, that I was going there, so they wouldn't have to follow.

"At eleven-thirty, I made no excuse. I stood and said quietly, 'I must be off.'"

"One fellow, who I suppose didn't know I lusted for Daffy, demanded, 'Where are you going so early?'"

"Although I was embarrassed, I replied with feigned indifference, 'I must be off is all.'"

"Rachel and Shelly looked so shocked I'm sure they couldn't understand me. Mark and Joe looked surprised too, but perhaps women had mystified them before, and I was just another one they didn't understand: they seemed more willing to accept my odd infatuation."

"I left. I don't think I have ever felt so excited as when I stepped out that door."
At the Triangle, I was waiting on a stool at the bar. I saw Lisa come in.

“She’s nuts,” I thought.

Although most seats were filled, it was not so packed that people were standing. Thirty feet from me, Lisa sat at a table, where for ten seconds she stared at me, and with this fixed look, professed that she had come for me. Upon withdrawing the gaze, she reposed, as if waiting for the cocktail server.

In this public setting, people were acting normal; but we silently had exchanged the insane messages:

“I remind you of Daffy Duck? You want me?”

"Yes, you do. I want you."

I was intrigued.

Lisa had leaped into madness, trusting I would be true to the fact that at Joe’s I had spoken like Daffy. She was sitting by herself. She was new to town and was surrounded by nosy Banermites.

“I suppose there’s no harm letting her squirm a bit,” I thought, in a Daffy quack.

I tried to look at her as he might: sardonically.

Scrutinizing me, Lisa started to think I was betraying her. She began to loathe me. Her eyes hardening, she inflicted a glare. She seemed to wonder if she should leave: she lowered her eyes. But she looked at me a second time. Even though we were thirty feet apart, and I hadn’t spoken, she perceived I inwardly was he. Behind her eyes, joy enkindled; she bashfully leered at me. I approached.

“This place is disgusting” I quacked. “Follow me.”
Driving my van to her house, I honked at other motorists.

“Watch where you’re going, buster. How imbeciles get licenses is beyond me.”

Once at her apartment, I grabbed her key and tried opening her door. Struggling with it, I failed.

“What sort of ignoramus designed this thing. You open it. I can’t be expected to do everything.”

An hour later, she had a fire going, and we were sitting on her couch. She rested her head on my chest.

“You’re despicable,” I quacked.

“Daffy... be nice,” she said, flirtatiously.

Later in the evening, when I spoke normally, she told me how she had come to yearn for him:

“I think having that womanly body part which is so obviously designed to receive, if you know what I mean, made me assume life would give me all I needed. I expected too much, particularly from men. Perhaps I’m not the first woman to be disappointed, but I must not have adjusted to this letdown as well as other women. I became depressed and started to fear men. The last time I let myself be interested in a regular guy I was twenty-four. But I couldn’t stand being disappointed again. When he asked me out, I said ‘No.’”

“Around this time, I had been getting up early Saturday mornings to watch the Looney Tunes. One day, I realized the reason was that Daffy attracted me. Unbeknownst to me, the strangeness of this frightened me so much that I fabricated a false explanation
which let me think I was half normal:

“Five months previously, I had been dating a man and incessantly had insinuated he wasn’t good enough for me. Finally, he dumped me, and even though I had driven him off, I was depressed. I convinced myself that I was so angry with him that I had replaced him with Daffy Duck to mock him.”

“But one night when I was picking a movie in a video store and I saw him, I decided to mock him to his face. I selected a Daffy video, and when he was at the counter, I went there. We said “hi.” Then he saw my selection.

“‘You like Daffy?’ he asked.”

“I leered at him.”

“‘I’m going to put on a fire and cuddle up with Daffy,’

Thinking I was kidding, he laughed. But I held his eyes.

“Truly I am.”

“He believed me now; he looked at me like he was frightened he had once dated me.”

“That evening, I re-examined my attraction to Daffy. I discovered what I believe is the real cause.”

“Daffy is obnoxious and he repulses me. But since I never could expect a lot from him, he couldn’t disappoint and depress me. I imagine I would feel safe around him. I think that’s why he excites me.”

“Imagining you were him, I didn’t hope to be satisfied. nor did I fear a let down. I let myself go. Ironically, I enjoyed myself.”
Listening to this lunacy, I began to feel Lisa could adapt to any madness I exposed her to. I became convinced I liked her.

I wondered if she, too, liked me.

"For you to be prevented from expecting too much from a man and being disappointed, why wouldn't any guy who disgusts you do?" I asked.

"Most men who disgust me don't attract me," she replied. "There is something about Daffy. Life is weird, which I feel he acknowledges. He deals with it by being a buffoon. I find this courageous. By the way, I sense you are a buffoon in a similar way."

I always had suspected that, when people get married for the right reason, it is that, even though they repulse one another, they still like each other. Though some people temporarily feel romantic, Lisa skipped right to being repulsed. But she still desired me. I was flattered.

Perhaps I felt that, if someone were witnessing my life, it would have more meaning. No doubt I also wanted company. Lisa and I began seeing each other almost every night. She eventually said she wanted to feel special: she wanted me to be monogamous. I agreed.

Upon my asking, in jest, if I had to marry her as Daffy, she replied, seductively, "No, you don't have to do thaaaaat," drawing out the "a" sound to imply I did have to do something in this regard.

Five months after we met, we went to the altar, and I knew I was promising
always to act like Daffy, when making love to her. But having expected I would have to make some sacrifices in life, I thought I would be able to oblige this fantasy of hers. I also thought it fitting that my wife would be lunatic enough to require it. But, as I will explain, I did not accept the change as graciously as I had hoped.

As we settled into being husband and wife, we made love three nights a week. Two years later, I had become Daffy, in this way, about three hundred times, and each time, Lisa so rigorously insisted I mimic him as best I could that she would stop me if she sensed I no longer was in character. During climax, I always had to speak like him, which required discipline. Furthermore, as he has no beard, she pestered me until I shaved mine.

I have no theatrical talent, but perhaps since changing into him was always followed by ecstasy, my subconscious grew adapt at becoming him, more so than I would have liked. The most poignant way to express this is to explain that, three times near the end of the second year, when just after love-making I glimpsed my naked flesh in the mirror, I thought I had been plucked.

Furthermore, ten times while working at my shop, I realized I had been thinking in his voice for an hour or so. Three of these times I had made and received phone calls, and I was unsure that I had not spoken like him.

Although I had expected marriage would change me, I had not known I would be turned to Daffy Duck. I came to resent the transformation.

I said to Lisa, "You should let me be myself once a week."

But she protested, "You don't know how dangerous that would be. Expecting more from you than I would from Daffy could ruin our marriage."
“Then I should be allowed to see other women.”

“I’ll make it up to you some other way.”

“That’s right... You will.”

In the past, I so successfully had used to guard my sense of identity that the beautiful Grace Proctor had been unable to bend me into shape, so to speak. But now I was Daffy Duck. Having become accustomed to living with Lisa and being her husband, I had weakened. I always had found life confusing, and though pathetic to admit it, a part of me embraced the simplicity of thinking of myself as Daffy, especially since in this mode Lisa loved me.

But this sense of identity was humdrum, to say the least. Furthermore, I suppose I also dreaded the possibility that, if she ever left me, a period would occur during which, despite her absence, I would still feel like him.

I desired to continue liking Lisa. Recalling my theories about evil, I decided I should take revenge. What follows may seem hateful, but until I explain how I justified my behavior, please withhold judgment.

I bought a hundred cheap plates and a slab of steel four feet by four feet. After bolting the slab to the wall above the stairs, which is next to our kitchen and leads to the basement, I waited for Lisa to come home from work. When she did, I showed her the contraption.

“I love you,” I said. “This slab is going to save our marriage. Three times a week, upon taking a plate and positioning myself ten feet in front of that slab, I’m going to call you. You are to come. I’m going to ask, ‘How’s it going?’”
“While you look me in the eye and tell me your plans for the day, or how your day was, I’m going to smash the plate against the slab. But you are not to look at the crash, complain, nor snicker. Just keep talking about your day, until I say, “Really, how interesting.”

“That will be the end of it.”

Perplexed and a bit angered, Lisa demanded, “How is this going to save our marriage?”

“You’re not allowed to ask. Will you do it or won’t you?”

“OK, OK,” she conceded, irritated.

“Good,” I thought. “It bothers her.”

Over five years, I smashed almost eight hundred plates. Often, I waited five minutes, until she was trying to articulate a complicated event, before I threw it. Twice, she botched the procedure. Once, she smirked; the other time, she broke down, screeching that she couldn’t take it any more. Both times, I left her for a week, after which she agreed to comply with the process rigidly. Eventually, she developed a twitch: often when I handled a plate, just for normal reasons, the corners of her eyes would quiver.

The smashing of the plates served three purposes. Firstly, it symbolized a destructive reaction, on my part, against her construction of me as Daffy. Secondly, by submitting to it, she showed that, for the sake of the relationship, she was willing to match the sacrifice I had made by becoming him. Thirdly, the tension the ordeal caused her, evidenced by the twitch, verified to me that I was avenging myself.

Please, before you judge, let me remind you, once more, that I had sort of been
changed to Daffy Duck, no less. I sincerely was bitter about it. Had I not smashed the plates, I think I probably would still have avenged myself, but in a less forthright manner. Perhaps I would have maintained husbandly appearances, but banished her from me emotionally; or habitually made snide comments to her in a pleasant, forked-tongued sort of way.

But satisfied I was avenging myself, I eschewed such hypocrisies.

Furthermore, often when Lisa submitted to the plate smashing, my heart went out to her. And on the whole, I loved her. I treated her well. I speculated that few men could maintain such tenderness for a woman who would have preferred to have married Daffy Duck. At times when I thought of discontinuing the plate smashing, I decided I best keep it.

We were living in my place in the county. Since in winter driving was treacherous, Lisa wanted to live closer to her parlor, downtown. Having defined our relationship, we decided to move to the suburbs.

We bought a three-bedroom bungalow, which was located across from Banerm’s mayor. Since Banerm’s population was only five thousand, being mayor did not deserve to be admired more than, for example, owning and running a small corner store. The neighborhood didn’t exude wealth.

The mayor, Davis Webster, had inherited a small furniture store from his father, and from gossiping sorts, I had heard that the smartest thing Davis ever did was hire
someone to run it. Yet, I also heard he was so pompous that he was known to attach "the third" to his name.

As Lisa and I were moving in, unloading some stuff from my van, Davis came out of his house and walked to his car. Watching him, I agreed he sauntered in a way that, if you didn't know who he was, you would think he had something tremendous of which to be proud.

He seemed impressed by the thought, "There are my new neighbours. I'm the mayor."

But I was feeling generous.

"Hello mayor," I bellowed across the street.

Affecting an air of modesty, he replied, "Oh, you don't have to call me that."

For an instant, I forgot he would be offended by the following remark.

"Surely you don't want me to call you David Webster the third," I jested.

When thrice, over the next month, Davis and I ended up in our driveways at the same time, I waved but he ignored me. I ascertained he had decided never to forgive me for teasing him. In my opinion, he was being petty, but I thought of apologizing.

I considered, though, if I should not. Feeling that Davis wasn't my type of guy, so to speak, I predicted that, no matter if I apologized, he and I always would irk one another. I remembered my theory on evil and wondered if I should dislike someone. I thought Davis might be perfect. From then on, when I saw him across the street, I ignored him, as he did me.

But even when neighbours get along, they often exhaust the small talk they can
muster, so being aloof, Davis and I didn’t much differ from those around us. But we 
inhabited a small town and were bound to encounter one another out and about; for 
example, at a grocery or gas station. When I met other neighbours in places like this, 
perhaps the coincidence granted a chance to show emotion: we acted surprised and 
pleased. I thought that, if in these spots, Davis and I still ignored each other, we would be 
signifying severe hatred, which I didn’t want.

We first encountered one another, publicly, in a video store. I acknowledged him.

“Hellooo...,” I said, affecting a tenuous "o" sound, as if to apologize for the 
hypocrisy of my greeting him.

Davis said "hello" neutrally and calmly, to the point of insulting me, as if to boast 
that, as mayor, he knew how to greet someone he disliked, without making stupid "o" 
sounds.

The next time we met, I greeted him by saying his name sarcastically. I didn’t 
taunt him blatantly, but subtly sharpened the "a" sound, "Daeeevis," as if the fact that he 
existed soured my mouth.

As for him, he calmly said "hello" again, as though he had noticed I sharpened the 
"a" sound, but, at most, was surprised I would bother.

Over the next couple of years, at fifty encounters, I said his name to him as if it 
were barbed, and he always replied "hello" in an indifferent tone. Sometimes though, 
keeping this detached air, he also would sound exasperated, as if a child were bothering 
him. Other times, he would sound appeasing, as if he feared I was nuts and he didn’t want 
to anger me. He affected these nuances well, which irritated me. As I had planned, I
disliked him.

I imagined Davis the sort who, if forced and empowered, would sacrifice the masses in order to maintain the self-important way he perceived himself. I felt he was of the mold who corrupts the world. Although I hold that I didn’t hate him, I sneered at the sight of him when he walked out his door. I never intended to harm him, but were he accidentally to drop something on his foot, I would have been pleased. When people asked what I thought of him, I said, “I dislike him.”

I thought this mild hate was excellent, but it turned messy.

The thing which caused us to flounder will seem so absurdly trivial that I suspect ... rather, I know, most will be unable to understand the way I experienced it. But, to me, it was "big." It is one of the reasons I thought my story worth telling. One may want to think of the thing as an unorthodox, excessive, desire. The thing is Fruit Loops, but not as you understand them.

Since I have known only one person who appreciated them as much as I, I know I would fail in trying to convey, to the majority, how I felt about them. Only he would understand.

But Fruit Loops largely determined what follows. So when I should express my experience of them, I will compare it to feelings more commonly encountered. For anyone who may wonder if he or she feels about them as I did, I can provide the following test:

Before one falls asleep at night, one often briefly passes through a hypnotic condition, in which, although one feels awake, one thinks strange and involuntary
thoughts. In this state, my mind always repeated a particular phrase about Fruit Loops. The chant epitomized how I felt about them. I doubt one could experience Fruit Loops as I did, and before falling asleep, not be prone to imagining a similar phrase.

But since, when written, the chant doesn’t have the nuance it contains when intoned in the mind before sleeping, I think that to include it would baffle and disappoint likely all who read it. I shall leave it out.

One afternoon, while sitting in my living room, looking through our picture window, I saw Davis pull into his driveway and begin taking in groceries. He was carrying four bags. A box of Fruit Loops fell out and landed on the pavement. I winced. Instead of proceeding with the bags and returning for the Fruit Loops, Davis put them down, picked up the Fruit Loops, and carried just them into the house. I would have done the same. I was stunned.

Remembering how I felt that day, I have thought of something to which to compare the obsession.

I had a friend, Jack, who was a business consultant, and in the firm for which he worked, competition was stiff. The mood was serious.

Jack, too, aspired to excel, and he did, but one day, while in his boss’s office, being earnestly told that he must treat a particular client of his especially well, something, which he did not understand, struck him as funny. Although the discussion was serious and Jack did not want to look like a fool before his boss, he began feeling he would be unable to suppress a snicker. He struggled to repress this irrational emotion. But while his
boss was in mid-sentence, the strange feeling overcame Jack, and a chuckle burst from him. His boss stopped.

Panicked by what he had done, Jack affected an attentive look, hoping his boss would ignore the outburst and continue. He and his boss stared at each other. Oddly his boss, too, snickered. Although neither knew what was funny, both soon were laughing so hysterically that Jack's boss was bent over in his chair guffawing, his back turned.

But after forty-five seconds of this hysteria, their insane behavior suddenly disgusted Jack; his face became serious.

The boss turned, saw this, and was so startled that he, too, stopped laughing.

There was awkward silence.

"That was scary," Jack said, breaking the tension.

"Yeah," his boss agreed, uneasily.

Regardless of the fact that I despised Davis, I was so amazed that he might covet Fruit Loops as I did, I needed to determine, for certain, if he did.

There, however, was an obstacle. I don't know why, but the obsession entailed feeling ashamed. Although my particular conscience permitted me vast freedom, I can't honestly deny that the obsession disconcerted me. Assuming Davis felt even more abashed about it, I predicted I would have to be tactful to reveal how he felt about Fruit Loops. The next morning, I waited for him to come out his door, and when he did, I exited mine.
Walking toward him, I said, pleasantly, "Good morning, Davis. You were taking in your groceries yesterday. I see you enjoy Fruit Loops."

I had reasoned that, if he wasn't obsessed with them as I was, he would appear surprised I was making small talk with him, and he also would think I was bizarre for raising such a trivial topic. But if he did desire them as I, he would appear strangely intrigued that I mentioned them, and/or the topic of Fruit Loops would embarrass him.

When I made the statement, he slowly stopped walking. He peered at me. I, too, stared at him. Although at first he looked interested in me, his expression changed: he looked troubled.

"My daughter eats them," he declared, affecting a look that implied he was irritated I had interrupted him with such a stupid comment.

He continued to his car.

But knowing the obsession as I did, I could recognize it. I had never before met anyone who shared it; I was astonished that, upon looking at Davis from this close range, I heard the obsession rumble in his voice; I perceived it bulging in him. Energy boiled in me. I should have been cautious. As the obsession fused with my dislike for him, the forces brewed, and at his lie, I felt anger. I released a nasty; I returned an untruth:

"I've read Kellogg's is going to stop manufacturing them. You should tell your daughter to eat them while she can."

Looking back, I know I should have been forewarned.

I realize that most people can't relate to the fact that, if Davis couldn't obtain
fresh Fruit Loops, he would be devastated. To anyone who has been able to disregard the way he or she experiences Fruit Loops and empathize with the fact that Davis and I were obsessed with them, I apologize, but here is another situation with which to compare the obsession. Furthermore, as most people, no doubt, can't relate to the obsession, there are more.

Imagine, if you will, a man who so enjoys golfing, he has widowed his wife, so to speak. I have known such types and noticed the level to which they are obsessed, and I feel that, if for some reason, golf became prohibited, and this man had to quit, he would be afraid. What most will, no doubt, find unbelievable is that, if Davis had to stop eating Fruit Loops, he would have felt worse.

Please be aware though, that an obsession with golf resembles “the obsession” only in intensity.

About to open his car door, Davis again stopped. As he stared blankly into space, such misery descended on his face that, witnessing it, I became disturbed. I averted my eyes.

I waited twenty seconds, then,

"Just kidding," I muttered.

As Davis turned toward me, I saw that tears had reddened his eyes. I felt intense. I thought that, for now, I had exposed his obsession enough. I stared at him, but began moving toward my house. He watched. But experiencing such intimacy, uncommon between men, I felt so strangely wild that this liveliness compelled me to stop, to seize
more. My obsession boiled. I walked back until two feet separated us. Davis was so
mesmerized that he did not question my advance. He just stared.

I held his eyes.

“You're almost always thinking about Fruit Loops,” I declared.

Confounded that I knew, Davis remained entranced, his mouth agape. For ten
more seconds, I stared into his eyes, pressing the allegation. I again walked away. Upon
reaching my house, I looked back. He still was staring. I went in.

One might compare how I felt to the following:

A philosopher can impose such rigor on ideas that it may take one’s breath away.
Furthermore, a financial tycoon may accumulate billions of dollars. Yet such types still
are earth-bound. On t.v., I once saw a guy who, several times, has snuck up on a
particular philosopher and pushed a pie into his face. He also has landed one in the face
of a man worth almost forty billion.

In the case of the philosopher, I think it’s an unfair paradox that someone, who
strains with ideas as he must, is still vulnerable to such a stupid thing as a pie in the face.
When on t.v. I saw him receive it, he appeared “ruffled.” He fought back.

As for the billionaire, though, I speculated that, if one is willing to be someone
who has this much money, whilst incongruently, millions are starving, then one might
deserve the paradoxical pie. After receiving it, he didn’t fight back. I wondered, if he gave
his money away, keeping only enough so that he was free from work, would he still react
so passively?
Someone once said that a person is his/her desire. Even if this theory simplifies what being human means, one might agree that it approximates the condition. Furthermore, if desire so defines one’s identity, then to want something unusual, is to feel truly different.

Being eccentric, I thought I pushed the boundaries of being human. But obsessing over Fruit Loops, I felt I hardly was human. Now, however, I had discovered that Davis was obsessed with them too. I began feeling I might fit into nature’s design after all.

The evening after I confronted him, as the intensity of advancing on him wore off, my obsession simmered. I thought about him calmly. I realized that, when he was young, the obsession must have made him feel so weird that he had needed to confirm to himself that he belonged. I speculated that this was why he had become mayor.

Realizing this, I began to sympathize with him. Also, even though I liked venturing humanity’s fringes, I wouldn’t have denied that I was reassured, knowing a man obsessed with Fruit Loops was able to accord with society enough to become mayor. I began thinking well of Davis. Recalling that my ancestors had lived near Banerm county, I wondered if he and I might be distantly related: if that was why we shared the obsession.

I was obsessed with Fruit Loops.

I had hated Davis; but I began wanting to like and befriend him. I decided that, the next day, I would try being civil toward him.

I knew that, meanwhile, he was thinking about me and was realizing that, to perceive how he felt about Fruit Loops, I must also be obsessed with them. Until now, we
each had been obsessed solitarily, which was lonely. So, even though I knew he would flinch at discussing Fruit Loops, I thought he would honour my effort and muster some candour.

I approached him again the next day.

"Davis," I said. "I'd like to discuss Fruit Loops with you maturely. I apologize for telling you Kellogg's was going to stop manufacturing them, and although I don't hide my desire for them, I will understand if you prefer others don't know how you feel about them. I promise not to tell. I also realize you and I have disliked each other; but I think the fact that we share the obsession nullifies this animosity. I never have met anyone I can discuss them with. Perhaps we both acquired the obsession genetically, and have a common heritage."

Looking at me, Davis remained expressionless. He then returned a statement which he must have known I would disbelieve, but which signified he chose not to confide in me. In my opinion though, he generally was deluded: I think he sort of believed what he told me.

"Occasionally I have Fruit Loops," he said, as if desiring to mock and insult me. "But as I've explained, my daughter eats them all for the most part. Take my word for it, our ancestors were not related."

When I had deceived Davis into thinking Kellogg's was going to stop making Fruit Loops, I had felt my temperance begin to slouch. Now, he had lied again and had spoken in a righteous tone. I felt angry. The spine of my temperance broke. Bitterness boiled in me. I began to feel that his hypocrisy incurred a moral debt, which the obsession
would revenge, and that I would assist this repercussion.

I think many people would agree that there are things in life which peak, and that, at the base of them, are chasms where folks suffer for having pursued these things too resolutely. I felt Davis and I hazarded such plunges.

I think Davis assumed he had mastered his obsession and that I would be incapable of meddling with it. He neglected to realize that, since I pushed mental boundaries, I had ventured further into the obsession than he would dare.

I had an idea which I knew would tantalize him. I will compare how I imagined it would tempt him, to the following; however, please know that, in what follows, I am only feebly reaching to express the obsession.

I am thinking of a woman who works in an office building, where she is manager of her department and is in charge of a dozen people. Her department, on the fifteenth floor, has an elevator which opens in an area in which usually six or so people are sitting at desks, or standing around. Often, when the woman returns from lunch, she is on the elevator alone. Behind its closed doors, in this building where she is respected, she has taken to making deranged faces. She particularly enjoys making them during the lapse between the instants the elevator stops and when it opens, when she would be revealed.

Briefly, here are two more comparisons to the obsession.

Please imagine a newly retired male teacher, who is sitting in a bar and is a bit drunk. Two students, whom he had taught the previous year, walk in. They are under-age.
One of them is smart mouthed and used to drive the teacher so nuts he hardly could keep from fattening his lips. They get to talking. Since they live in a small town, the two boys say there's nothing to do, that's why they're in the bar.

The man knows that, in their eyes, he is "teacher," and he wants to get off on shocking them. He puts on an air of being appalled by young people's lack of imagination.

"What?? Nothing to do? At your age?"

Under his breath, but loud enough for them to hear, he mutters, "Assholes."

He sort of knows he is being ironic: that he, too, obviously is so bored he has nothing better to do than get drunk in the local pub and call former students obscene names. But since he also knows the boys don't want to get booted from the bar for being under age, he feels he can get away with acting so irrationally. He is right.

The second comparison I am thinking of concerns a guy I knew, who left Banerm and went to University in the city, where he studied science. He made good marks. He also met a woman, whom, after dating her for three years, he knew he wanted to marry.

But there was a problem. Whilst he wore purple hair, baggy pants and ear rings, his girlfriend wanted him to show evidence that he would mature. Since he achieved academically, all he had to do to appease her was dress normally. But although he desired to marry her, he couldn't get himself to give up his pubescent appearance. She dumped him. He was heartbroken.

Comparing these quirks to the way Davis felt when I revealed my idea to him will seem incongruous, so I ask that you recall he and I experienced Fruit Loops in a singular
way. Please trust that the analogies apply.

I said to him, "I have a pillow stuffed with Fruit Loops."

I walked away, leaving him with the image. Upon reaching my house, I looked back.

Although in the past Davis had restrained his obsession, he now would fear that, knowing the pillow idea, he might be unable to abstain from it. But for the moment, as I looked at him from my steps, he was smiling.

I now understand that, at this point, an inner itch was tingling me, so to speak, which I would scratch until blood assuaged it.

I had imagined a pillow stuffed with Fruit Loops, but had feared making one and satisfying myself so excessively. I had lied: I had no such pillow. But the next day, after buying seven boxes of Fruit Loops, I filled a pillow case with them.

I knew I could betray to people that Davis was obsessed with Fruit Loops. They would be slow to believe me, but since his obsession bubbled beneath the face he put forth in public, I knew he would fear that, if people were given reason to scrutinize him, they might perceive he was strange.

I also knew I could conjure other ways to tempt him. Since I had this power over him, I thought that, if I didn't torment him, I was being merciful. I assumed he knew this. I started to become demented. Looking back, I realize I began to feel that, if I didn't abuse him, he owed me gratitude.

At nine in the morning, three days after I made the Fruit Loop stuffed pillow, I
saw Davis come out his door. Having power over him, I think I felt unoblige to behave rationally and to consider what motivated me. I now believe that I wanted to see if he would react against me, or if fearing me, he desired to appease me and, to indulge me, would sacrifice pride and allow me to abuse him.

I had nothing to say; but I charged out my door, and at the foot of his driveway, I stopped. I stared at him.

Davis must have been able to repress the idea of a Fruit Loop stuffed pillow. He also must have been naive enough to assume I wouldn't dare venture so far into the obsession that I could conjure another idea with which to tempt him. He seemed not to fear me. He kept his stride.

"I don't have time to talk foolish with you," he said, fearlessly.

Had he just scurried to escape me, I might have felt he sufficiently acknowledged that I could endanger him. But he didn't. Although he possessed the choice of his reaction, I seemed to insist he act knowing the truth of my power over him: I felt compelled to cure him of the naive innocence which gave him courage against me - to show him the extremes a human will hazard. As the wrath of my obsession boiled, an idea, which I never before had imagined, surfaced in my mind. No sooner had I thought it than I blurted it out; it would never again be unknown to either of us.

"I'm going to buy powdered milk and bathe in them," I announced.

As I saw myself doing this, the image zapped the vision from my eyes which perceived the real world.

I recall muttering, "Ohhh, myyy..."
I guesstimate that a minute passed, while at the foot of Davis's driveway, I stood entranced. When reality regained my vision, I saw Davis standing in the "v" between his car and its open door. He was still immersed in his own envisioned tub of Fruit Loops. When he escaped the image, he beheld me. At first, his eyes remained soft. But then rage hardened his eyes and he seemed to begin calculating how to charge upon me. But confusion dissolved this glare. His eyes softened again, and an ecstatic giggle burst from him. But he quickly wrapped his lips around the outburst. His eyes hardened again. Three seconds later, they again were soft and he was smiling. His face seemed blown by conflicting winds of love and hate.

Looking thus confused but energized, he began moving toward me. I felt he might attack, and that if he did, we would struggle viciously. A greater part of me wanted to avoid violence than did not. I thought of running. But as I did not want to inspire him to pursue, I stayed facing him, and, almost as unhurried as his slow advance, I began retreating across the road.

Upon reaching half way to my house, I turned and walked. I anticipated I might hear his feet shuffle and be gripped on the shoulder, or body checked; but I proceeded untouched. I made it into my house. I went to our picture window, but stayed back far enough so that he could not see me. For two minutes, at the foot of my driveway, he stood and stared, his face still looking blown by those conflicting winds.

That afternoon, I went to the grocery store. All the cashiers knew I was obsessed with Fruit Loops, but since I preferred them fresh, I never before had bought twenty
boxes.

"What are you going to do now, bathe in them?" the guy serving me jested.

Recalling how I responded, I am reminded of a similar incident, which most people likely will find easier to relate to.

One year, the Banermighters (the basketball team) went to the nationals. Although the tournament was held in the city, three hundred miles away, many Banermites went to support our team. Since the games were televised, I watched them. Several times, the camera-person focused on the Banerm fans. I knew these folks to behave conservatively, but when they saw that camera pointed at them, they hooted and hollered, as if they were on crack, heroin, and LSD combined.

Responding to the cashier in the grocery store, I was similarly overzealous. Behind me, three people were lined up, and in the adjacent aisles, were others.

As if bragging, or sharing my idea, I announced, "Yes, I’m going to pour powdered milk in my tub and bathe in Fruit Loops."

Banerm being small, the other shoppers already knew I was odd. They looked at each other and smirked. One got sarcastic.

"Good idea," he said, at which some of the others snickered.

Not easily abashed, I endured this mockery. But to forget, albeit momentarily, that others were not obsessed with Fruit Loops was uncharacteristic of me. I could have heeded this regression; instead, as I helped bag my twenty boxes, my hands trembled with
Fifty-nine hours later, I had sat in my tub fifty-eight and a half hours.

Before each meal of Fruit Loops, I scooped out the soggy ones, flushed them down the toilet, and poured in freshies. When I had to relieve myself, the toilet was just a foot to my right. Furthermore, stuck to the back of the tub was a blown up head rest, which, when I slept, was comfortable enough. The best way to express how good it was is to explain how I got out.

I knew that, if I somehow got bored bathing in Fruit Loops, life’s talons would drop me from a height which might kill me. Also, staying in my bathroom, I could not earn a living.

But on the third day, when Lisa came and asked, “when are you coming out?” I hadn’t yet thought about it. I stared at her and did not respond.

“The water is giving you a rash,” she said. “When are you coming out?”

I stared for ten more seconds.

“I guess I don’t know.” I said. “Maybe you should go buy twenty or so more boxes.”

Lisa walked out.

A minute later, she returned, carrying a leather belt. As she raised it, I tried to block the blow, but before I could, she lashed my back. I screeched. Although I stood to restrain her, she landed one on my private part. I groaned and buckled. My strength drained, I was unable to overpower her.
Lisa does not exaggerate, and she claims she dealt fifty lashes before I retreated all the way out of the bathroom. She probably gave sixty.

After forcing me into the hall, she locked me out. She says I twice banged the door. Then for ten minutes, I stood there, until she heard me rush away. After remaining in the bathroom for an hour and hearing no sign of me, she came out, but locked the door behind her, even though she later had to bust the knob to get back in.

She searched upstairs, but did not find me. She went to the basement. Instinctively, I must have tried to numb my "self." In front of the freezer, Lisa saw food scattered on the floor. She opened the lid.

My teeth chattering, I claimed, "I'll be OK in here another fifteen minutes."

She re-shut the freezer, but as she later told me, she unplugged it, not that this reduced the chill.

Ten minutes later, I pushed the lid up a crack to admit some air. Lisa assumed I was thinking of coming out and she opened it.

I must have known I still was tempted to bolt back to the tub.

"CONAN MOVIES," I blurted, even though I never had seen a Conan movie.

After Lisa slammed the lid, I heard her hoist things on top; then for five minutes, she was gone.

Upon returning, she took the things off, opened the lid, and handed me clothes and rope.

"Get dressed," she said. "Then tie your legs together, such that you can make small steps, but if you head for the bathroom, I can trip you."
After doing this, I came out of the freezer. We proceeded out to her car and drove to a video store. We went to a motel and I watched two Conan movies. I watched the first one a second time and viewed half the second one a second time; then I fell asleep.

If I were to relive the ordeal to the extent that I might be able to determine why I craved these movies, I would be too much disquieted. I apologize.

Since Lisa's biceps were much smaller than mine, I thought that, for her to be confined in a bathroom, yet land sixty blows on me and maneuver me out, she had persevered in a grueling situation. I thought love must have fortified her. Even though she may, primarily, have been concerned about rescuing the Daffy in me, I reasoned that being able to impersonate him was part of who I was.

Had a man my size wrestled me out, I might have been more inclined to refill the tub with Fruit Loops. But since I wanted to honor Lisa's loving deed, I was inspired to resist the temptation. This sense of obligation was supplemented by the fact that I did not want to repeat the torment of getting out. I never again bathed in Fruit Loops. I was so grateful to Lisa that I discontinued the plate smashing.

However, having experienced the pleasure of bathing in Fruit Loops, ordinary things which I had used to enjoy bored me now, even blacksmithing. I had had a feeling this would happen. Furthermore, I expected to regain my taste for those pleasures. Nevertheless, since I was unsure I would, the possibility I might not terrified me.

I appreciated Lisa; so I demanded of myself that I not vent my frustration on her. I groused inwardly.
I recall that, upon making mistakes at work, I would grumble things like, "Good one, idiot," or "I am quite stupid, aren't I?"

Sitting in front of the t.v., I would ask, "Am I pathetic enough to watch another stupid program?"

"Yes I am."

I seemed to release frustration, making someone feel miserable, even though that someone was I.

Sitting in Fruit Loops had caused me great pleasure, but I had felt small in them, as if everything consisted of just me and them, alienated from cosmic forces I might exchange with the Universe and the rest of humanity. I would not have wanted to die wallowing in them, nor while striving to resist them. I seemed to fear death more than usual.

One day, I read in the Banerm Gazette that a local man had been killed in a car crash.

"I'm glad that wasn't me," I thought.

Yet I seemed to enjoy morbid fantasies.

Sort of jesting, I repeatedly would wonder, "Perhaps I should kill myself."

I would imagine shooting off my head, and this image would assuage me.

After two months passed, still, about twenty times a day, a trace of the memory of floating in Fruit Loops would enter my conscious thought, and I would be funneled into the whole recollection. I would wallow in it. Despite that I would struggle to expel the desire, I would imagine taking a box of Fruit Loops from the cupboard and hustling to the

Although I had expected time would subdue my memory of floating in them, it didn’t. For a few days, the recollection would seem to fade, then it would loom as vividly as immediately after I had come out of the tub. Three months after getting out, I had no reason to believe the memory would ever leave me.

I was losing self-control. I began hating myself. I believe I started feeling I should provoke everyone to despise me, so as not to mislead anyone who may have liked me.

In the past, even though I always had acted in an unorthodox manner, I had thought that, as much as most people, I was questing toward sanity. But now, even though I had caused my suffering, I felt like avenging myself on life. I cast off the quest.

I believe that, if people achieve power over others, they often become deluded they have mastered themselves. I think that, wanting to feel this false sense of self-control, I began desiring to dominate my neighbours.

I bought a polka-dot robe, which resembled Fruit Loops. Wearing it enhanced my morning feasts of three bowls of them. It also served another purpose.

I think I instinctively knew that just elevating myself would provide a sense of power: one morning I had an urge to eat my Fruit Loops on the roof. I so anxiously desired a way to pacify myself that I did not question my motive. Fruit Loops in hand, I ascended the top of my house.

I liked it.

George, my neighbour who lived two houses to my right, came out of his front door on his way to work. My polka-dot robe made me conspicuous.
"What are you doing?" he hollered.

I think that, looking so far down on him, I felt unobliged to answer. I just stared.

Perhaps since George knew I was odd, he was uninterested in further pursuing a response. He got in his car. But while he drove by me, I kept staring. He looked irritated.

Every morning from then on, I ate my Fruit Loops on the roof. When my neighbours, as far away as five houses, came out of their doors, I would stand and stare at them. If they waved, I would not return the gesture.

Within a week, two shot me obscene gestures with their fingers, and two others stopped as they drove by.

"What the hell are you doing?" they asked.

"Staring at you."

"Why?"

"I don't have to answer to you."

I bought binoculars and a bird book.

Since all my neighbours worked, each would show his or her face at roughly the same time every day. I familiarized myself so well with their patterns that I could have reacted to the opening of their doors the instant before they proceeded through. But, instead, I would wait until they came out. I would spring up and point my binoculars at them, as if I had never seen such a sight.

In my lens, their faces would bulge. They looked spooked.

Since I could go to work when I pleased, I suppose one of the things I was doing
was flaunting this. I believe that, in my saturated state, I needed this hateful form of esteem. I apologize.

Usually my neighbours would try to ignore me. A few seemed truly not to care. Others would wave, perhaps trying to fool me into thinking I was not bothering them.

Two, I drove nuts.

One was a woman named Lorraine.

Looking at her through my binoculars, I always felt that she had spent a few seconds on the other side of her door, trying to prepare a face which was indifferent to me. I could tell I made her uncomfortable, but that she did not want me to know.

I imagined her husband suggesting, “Just don’t let him get to you.”

But despite her attempts to ignore me, on the ninth day, as she walked to her car, she spun around and shot me that obscene gesture with her finger.

The next morning, the police pulled up in front of me. I assumed Lorraine had called them.

“We've been told you direct your binoculars at people, and in windows,” they said.

I showed them my bird book.

“What the hell is this? I’m bird watching.”

The next day, Lorraine tried staring back at me. For five minutes, she partook in this madness. Then she lost her temper again, shot me that obscene gesture, and marched to her car.

In the days that followed, the whole time she walked from her door to her car, she
shot me this gesture every time. I wondered why she bothered.

The other person I drove nuts was Laurence, who lived four houses to my right and owned a small construction company. He was larger than I by about forty pounds. He kept shaking his fist at me, or pushing it into his other palm, to imply, I supposed, that sooner or later he was going to hit me.

Sure enough, one afternoon, while working at my shop, I looked up, and he was standing in the door. He looked vengeful, as if he had stopped to allow his fury to peak and he wanted me to observe this preparation. Without saying anything, he began moving toward me. I felt he was going to attack me, but that, just as I silently had been annoying people, he intended not to explain his motive.

He, however, had not counted on me holding a hot iron. He realized he would be unable to attack me. He looked startled that circumstance obstructed what he considered just. He remained resolved to assault something.

To his right was a large wooden shelving cabinet, containing hundreds of artifacts of my trade, such as tools and molds, which I had accumulated over ten years. I felt nostalgic about them. Other than Daffy, they were the only objects which might have symbolized my sense of self.

Lunging toward the shelving, Laurence gripped the back edge and pulled with a grunt. The structure began to tilt.

I was morally irrational. Even though I had been staring at Laurence from my roof, I felt he was trespassing upon me to such an extent that, unless I avenged the assault, I would be unable to respect myself. I felt rage.
Also, to his left was a workbench with four drawers filled with more of my things, which I also was concerned he might go for. I raised my iron to shoulder height.

When my tools smashed down, they made a metallic crash. Some, which were circular, rolled to the edges of my shop, where they fell with a wobbly clank. The shatter rang in my ears, then there was silence.

I had felt rage; but now upon seeking my anger, I discovered I had been purged of it. I thought I had gotten what I deserved. I was surprised to feel this way.

As for Laurence, he beheld my scattered things, then looked up at me.

A vengeful look of satisfaction on his face, he nodded once, as if to say, "There!"

I was still wielding my iron, but nodded back, as if to agree. While for five seconds, he stared at me, I stayed where I was and stared back at him. Then he slowly strutted out.

I think most people would agree that gawking at my neighbours from my roof in order to gain a false sense of power over myself was hatefully pathetic. Although even back then I knew this, I was using all my willpower to stay out of Fruit Loops and had none left with which to avoid behaving irrationally.

Nevertheless, my villainy further rotted my self loathing. This self-hate made me need a fast way to feel good about myself. The fastest was to bathe in Fruit Loops. But I restrained. I wish I had screamed into a recorder: I could let others know how I felt.

Davis's face also had loomed in my binoculars. He had been masterful at being
aloof.

One night, when I was particularly agonized, I remained awake all evening, tossing and turning. At six, when the sun rose, I quit the struggle and got up. Although I usually ascended my house at around eight, on this morning, I was up there by six-fifteen.

In the past, I had aimed my binoculars into Davis's bedroom, but he and Diana always had been up already. Now they were in there.

I once had read that the colours blue and red combined induce trust from people. Politicians often wear them. Three days out of five, Davis wore a blue suit and red tie. He now was wearing a red tie. Otherwise he was naked.

Since when men get dressed, the shirt goes on before the tie, I concluded that Davis had put on the tie for the sake of the particular act in which he and Diana were partaking.

The length of the tie, and their positioning, were such that the tie hung to where it was tickling Diana. In order to maintain this effect, Davis twice had to re-arrange the tie, which must have required discipline.

Watching them, I speculated that, although, as a man, Davis bored Diana, she got off on the fact that he was mayor, and that his tie tickling her helped her fantasize about his mayorhood. I imagined he often wore it for the occasion.

Lisa fantasized I was Daffy Duck; but I at least had smashed plates to avenge the insult. I imagined Davis was so full of pomp that he enjoyed putting on a tie and did not realize he should be insulted that Diana required it.
Also, judging from his refusal to admit he was obsessed with Fruit Loops, I speculated he was phony enough to convince himself, every time, that he had put on the tie before the shirt accidentally.

Furthermore, I thought about the fact that their bedroom curtains were open. I imagined he and Diana affecting a desire to let in some light to begin the day, but that really they were exhibitionists and liked to fantasize that people were watching the mayor and his wife doing their thing.

Also, I realized that, later, Davis would be sitting amongst the councillors at town hall. Imagining this same tie would be around his neck, perhaps subtly emitting bodily smells, I suspected he would get off on this. I also speculated that Diana, too, would be strangely pleased.

I measured this twistedness against Davis's refusal to admit he was obsessed with Fruit Loops, and already maddened as I was, his hypocrisy infuriated me.

The rage of my obsession again boiled.

I thought, "I should tell him, 'When you do that, imagine a row of Fruit Loops.'"

Much to my horror, thinking this, I introduced the temptation into my own struggle.

In the previous instant, had Fruit Loops tempted me a fraction more, I probably would have succumbed to them; now their charm doubled.

I feel that a part of me generally wants to be aggressive toward others. I suspect that a lot of people suffer this flaw. Although what happened next dishonors and chills
me, I fear that, if I wrote about it, it would arouse me. I would loathe myself. I also desist providing it to be enjoyed by other men. Aside from explaining what resulted from it, I must leave it out:

Lisa sort of understood that Fruit Loops were driving me mad. Frantically, I explained to her the new thought which had catalyzed my attack. I pleaded for mercy.

Since she loved me, by noon she decided she wanted me around enough such that, instead of having me imprisoned, she would thrash me.

We agreed on an initial three hundred lashes. She again took her leather belt in hand. Three quarters of the way through, I lost consciousness. But when I revived, she continued.

Each of the following ten days, she gave thirty more. The next three months, she gave thirty a week, then thirty a month, which, five years later, she still insists upon.

I have calluses.

If Davis had discussed Fruit Loops with me, I would not have gotten angry with him and thought of bathing in them, nor of this other idea. Perhaps he was unobliged to be honest with me; but demented as I was, I blamed him.

I thought of phoning him and whispering, “Imagine a row of Fruit Loops.”

But the devilishness of this frightened me. I mailed the message.

During this time, each weekday at five o'clock, a t.v. program came on that Lisa and I watched. Since our television was in the living room, we ate dinner in there, putting the plates on our laps. Upon glancing out our picture window at this time, three days after
I mailed the letter, I saw Davis come out his door. His face again was being blown by conflicting winds of love and hate; but he seemed to be forcing the scowl to prevail.

When, during the two previous days, I had thought of him receiving the letter, and of what he might do, I had imagined he might attack me with a knife or bat, and that struggling with him for my life might exorcise the obsession from me. It turned out he had no weapon; nevertheless, as he started up my driveway, my heart began thumping.

He did not knock. Although Lisa and I were still holding our plates on our laps, he was standing in our living room. Hyperventilating and seeming to force himself purely to hate, he stared at me for thirty seconds. He clenched his fists and filled his lungs. He screamed an obscene threat so loudly that, although a shout can do no bodily damage, I looked down, checking if I had been wounded. Uneasiness widened my eyes. As I looked at him, he glared at me for ten seconds to press the fact that he meant the threat. He marched out, slamming the door behind him.

Although I was shaken up, I noticed I felt better. I thought about what he had done, and I realized that, in a way, he had discussed the obsession. I became convinced that, if we talked about the obsession, we could vent its steam and subdue it. I began feeling my conflict with it soon would be resolved.

Over the next two days, a lull came over me. Although I knew that, more than ever, Davis would continue to resist me and be aloof, I, nevertheless, was anticipating that he and I soon would clash for the final time.

Lisa perceived this. Since she had a brother living just a fifteen-minute drive outside of Banerm, she said to me, "Maybe I should stay with him for a while and come
by just to thrash you.”

“Good idea,” I said.

Two days later at eight-thirty in the morning, while I was wearing my polka-dot robe and eating Fruit Loops on the peak of my roof, Davis's daughter, Elizabeth, came out of their front door and plopped down on their steps. She was wearing light blue pajamas and pink rabbit slippers; but she was scowling. After sitting for ten minutes and minding her own business, she looked over at me. She stared briefly, then put her head back down. However, after a minute passed, she looked at me again. This time, she kept staring. Something about this made me nervous. Although I looked down at my Fruit Loops so as to ignore her, she began walking toward me.

Upon stopping in the middle of my yard, she stared at me. She moved so close that I could not see her beneath the edge of my roof. Since, each morning, I used a ladder to ascend the roof, it was leaning there, and dumbfounded as I was, I failed to realize a four-year-old could not and should not climb it. I expected that, any instant, her head would appear. She, however, again showed herself in the middle of my lawn, and as she now was scowling at me, I realized she wanted me to descend to the edge.

Holding my Fruit Loops in my left hand, I crawled down on my back. I was agitated, but also was sympathetic to the fact that Elizabeth was just four.

“Yes?” I asked politely.

“Are you a daddy?” she replied, as though, if I weren’t, she would disapprove.

“Great,” I thought. “Now his four year old daughter is going to start snubbing
But I knew that any child of Davis's would be raised with preconceived notions about how others should be. I didn't blame her. I gave an explanation I thought would satisfy a four year old.

"Many men are daddies," I said. "But some aren't. I'm not."

Hearing this, Elizabeth looked more disappointed than I had predicted.

She complained, "I was going to ask you to turn the sky purple."

At first, her remark mystified me, but while she remained frustrated on my lawn, I deduced what might have led her to make the statement. I realized the obsession had caused it:

I guessed that, as I had suggested in my note to him, Davis had imagined a row of Fruit Loops while with Diana. Fantasizing about this once, he had been unable to stop. Now he imagined it every time. He disgusted himself. Worse, compared to the ecstasy of it, his usual pleasures now bored him, and this discontent terrorized him. Ironically, in this frightened state, he yearned the more for the imagined row of Fruit Loops.

For years he had denied the obsession; but beneath his denial it always had pulsed. Now, as a piece of mail, it had entered the part of him which most forcefully desired. He was unaware that, talking about it, he and I might subdue it. He likely recoiled from admitting it to himself, but he was horrified the obsession had claimed him.

A week previously, when I had imagined a row of Fruit Loops, I had known that things which had used to please me would now bore me, more than ever, and that this apathy would terrorize me. But in my situation there was a difference: six hours later, I
was burning beneath Lisa's belt and was wishing this beating to end. Furthermore, when finally she did finish, I awaited to be whipped again the next day. This pain and anticipation detracted from my terror of losing appreciation for regular pleasures. For this reason too, I had been lucky that, instead of having me put in jail, Lisa had thrashed me.

Since Elizabeth was four, I imagined she likely was starting to wonder about things and had asked Davis, "Why is the sky blue?"

Suspecting, as I did, that Davis was deluded about himself, I thought he probably was not admitting that the obsession was plaguing him, and was likely venting the frustration of the obsession on his family.

I imagined him replying to Elizabeth, in an impatient tone, "The sky is blue because I say it is."

Or perhaps he wasn’t venting frustration on his family and had spoken kindly. Yet, with the obsession tormenting him, he so badly had needed to feel good about himself that, when the opportunity arose, he succumbed to misleading Elizabeth into thinking he controlled the heavens.

Later, when Diana would chastise him for the deceit, Davis would say, "Children measure their ability by that of their parents. Think how esteemed she must feel, believing her father determined the color of the sky. In a couple of days, we’ll tell her the truth, but she’ll have learned how good she can feel about herself. We’ll explain that she should strive to feel this proud."

Whether in an impatient or friendly manner he had claimed to have created the
sky's blueness, Elizabeth had believed him. Davis had failed to predict, however, that, as four-year-olds are imaginative, she would want to see how the sky would look purple. Whatever happened next, Elizabeth became mad he would not perform the change. She went to the front steps and pouted. She saw me, sitting on my roof and wearing a polka-dot robe. I supposed she had assumed all daddies could affect the sky, and that, if I were one, I, in particular, would be willing to turn it purple.

Looking down on her and realizing the obsession was why she was standing there, adrenalin rushed through me.

"This is it," I thought.

I asked her, "Why don't you get your daddy to change the sky?"

Elizabeth must have feared that, if I knew she had come to me, after her father had said "No," I would disapprove. She eyed the ground and did not answer.

"He probably couldn't turn the sky purple anyway," I suggested.

She looked at me.

"Do you think he could?"

She nodded.

"How do you know?"

"He made it blue," she informed me.

"Can he make it purple?"

"He's too busy," she explained, regretfully.
I was right. Davis had told her he controlled the sky.

Daily, he paraded around as mayor and would not admit he was obsessed with Fruit Loops, yet he was so predictably demented and pompous that, through his closed front door, I had conjectured the fact that he had told his four-year-old daughter that he controlled the Heavens. I knew him well. I felt strangely irritated. My obsession rumbled.

Allowing the obsession to take its natural course, I said to Elizabeth, “Your father didn’t make the sky blue and can’t turn it purple. He lied.”

She stared at me.

Pointing to the house on my right, I said, “Mr. Kell lives there, right? He has two kids. He’s a daddy. If your father is telling the truth, Mr. Kell should be able to turn the sky purple. Right.”

Elizabeth stared.

“Go tell your father Mr. Kell turned the sky purple for you,” I continued. “Tell him to come look at the nice purple sky. If he is telling the truth, he’ll say something like, ‘you shouldn’t be bothering Mr. Kell,’ or ‘everyone likes the sky blue; tell Mr. Kell to turn it back.’”

“But, if your father is lying, he’ll know you are lying, and he’ll get mad or look at you funny.”

Elizabeth stared at me, seeming as though she understood my method of exposing this truth. I also sensed she was realizing that, unless I knew her father had lied, I would not have provided the method. For two minutes, neither of us spoke. As anger descended on her, her eyes sharpened and her chest began to heave.
Even though she was only four and was wearing light blue pajamas and rabbit slippers, she was trying to judge for herself if she should follow my plan and try to out-smart her father. She seemed to need me to fortify her. For sixty seconds, we stared at each other. During this moment, she must have become vastly skeptical, yet realized she had stumbled across someone who would be forthright with her.

Continuing to stare at me, she demanded, to my surprise, “Is there a Santa Claus?” as if she already knew.

I had assumed anyone would consider Davis’s lie about making the sky blue to be lunatic; but masses upon masses of folks back the Santa Claus deception. When youngsters in “the know” reveal the truth about Santa Claus, those still deceived, adults seem to accept their honesty, even admire it; but I thought people would find it abominable for an adult to be the one to cut short the fantasy.

Elizabeth looked so terribly innocent that, even though I usually balked at social norms, her question surprised and intimidated me. I diverted my eyes from her. But when five seconds later I looked back, she was still staring.

I decided, “When in doubt, tell the truth.”

“No,” I said.

Elizabeth looked down. Although I tried to think of something to say, I couldn’t. She said nothing either; but as she reflected on the revelation, she looked shocked. Then she looked infuriated. She decided to act on this fury. Without saying good-bye, she began marching toward her house. On her steps, she stopped, turned, and for ten seconds, she stared at me. I returned the gesture. She went in, and, as hard as a four-year-old could,
slammed the door behind her.

As I watched Davis’s house, all was silent; my heart thumped. I waited for fifteen minutes. Davis came out. He looked so furious that adrenaline gushed through me. He rumbled across the street.

He was enraged mostly by the fact that I had told Elizabeth he had lied about being able to determine the color of the sky, and that I had told her how to prove for herself that he was a liar. But I think he was embarrassed that I knew about this outrageous fib.

"Did you tell my daughter there is no Santa Claus?" he demanded, following his usual manner of denying the truth.

I was ready for conflict.

"Among other things, yes," I replied, in a droll manner.

I think Davis was accustomed to phoniness. Although I always had been forthright with him, he now seemed startled I would bluntly allude to the lie he had told about the sky. I think he wanted not to discuss it. His scowl tightened; but as he seemed to lack a response, he appeared panicked, and fury seemed to begin boiling within him. It erupted.

"YOU SIT ON YOUR ROOF AND GAWK AT PEOPLE! YOU BATHE IN FRUIT LOOPS! YOU'RE NUTS!! he yelled, at volume ten. "AND WHEN THEY COME TO TAKE YOU AWAY, I'M GOING TO LAUGH LIKE THIS: HA HA HA...HA HA HA!"

Wanting, I suppose, to prick his fury, I spoke calmly.

"You tell your daughter you can turn the sky purple, but I’m nuts?"
No sooner had I said this than Davis lunged at my ladder and hurled it to the ground. He looked up at me to appraise my reaction. I think he had thought that having no access to the ladder would disconcert me more than it did. He seemed unsatisfied. His eyes flaring, he decided to attack me. He picked the ladder back up, slammed it against the gutter, and began to scurry to the roof. Upon my pushing the ladder outward, however, Davis made a screaming arc toward the ground and was thrown backwards over the curb. He lay sprawled on the street.

For forty-five seconds, I rolled around guffawing, until I felt a painful clunk on my head. Davis had beamed me with a rock and was picking up another. Although I lunged over the roof for cover, he caught me in my lower back, which hurt.

From the road and from my neighbour, George’s, back yard garden, Davis snatched more rocks and began trying to fake me out to get a clear shot. While he ran back and forth from one side of my house to the other, I leaped from one side of the roof to the other. He rapidly drilled rocks at me. I knew the obsession was causing him to act like this.

When he was gathering rocks, and I had a break from ducking, I implored, “Let’s enjoy some Fruit Loops.”

Otherwise we didn't speak.

Although he eventually put a rock through one of my other neighbour's bedroom windows, Davis was so intent on hitting me that he didn't notice the crash. Ten minutes later, neither did he notice a cop arrive in a squad car.

The officer got out of his car. Since he knew Davis, he looked astonished. He
walked toward Davis and, as Davis was about to release a rock, the officer grabbed his arm.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

Startled and confused, Davis stared at him, panting.

"What the hell is going on?" the officer repeated.

Still, Davis just stared for fifteen more seconds. Then he looked vengeful.

"He misled my daughter," he declared.

The officer looked up at me. I rolled my eyes.

"What are you doing on the roof?" he demanded.

"I don't have to answer to you about that."

"You see! Davis said, excitedly. "You see how he is!"

As the officer began speaking into his walkie talkie, Davis seemed satisfied. He gleamed at me. I was amused. I think he expected I would be worried. On his face, rage returned.

As the officer spoke into his walkie talkie, he wasn't paying attention to Davis. Davis didn't even have to be sneaky: he walked over and slipped the officer's gun out of his holster. The officer was shocked.

"Davis!!" he screeched.

Davis looked crazed. Looking at the gun, he started laughing hysterically. The officer began backing away and again spoke into his walkie talkie.

Knowing the obsession as I did, I thought Davis might actually kill me. I was afraid. I also was worried Davis might be imprisoned for the rest of his life.
Davis pointed the gun at me and smiled in a sinister fashion. Having sparse time to think, I decided to stay true to the obsession.

"Come up and share a bowl," I said.

Still pointing the gun and smiling, Davis said, as if flaunting his power to lie, "I don't like Fruit Loops."

"Sure you do," I replied, "You're obsessed with them, otherwise you wouldn't be holding that gun."

Davis responded in a way I hadn't predicted.

With a calm voice, he flaunted his power.

"I don't have a gun. Tell me I don't have a gun, or I'll shoot you."

This blatant hypocrisy angered me so much I recklessly abandoned my attempt to placate him.

"You're nuts," I said.

This struck Davis as hilarious.

"Oh, I'm nuts am I?" he cackled.

Upon laughing at this, he became hysterical. I was surprised he was able to keep the gun pointed at me.

Meanwhile, fifty feet down the road, a second cop had pulled up. Since this cop was young and was new to Banerm, he didn't know Davis was mayor. Shielding himself with the door of his squad car, he aimed his gun.

"Freese psycho!"

Upon hearing the cop, Davis thought he was talking to me. He stopped laughing,
but looked vindicated. He gave me a triumphant glare. Upon turning however, he saw the cop was pointing at him. He was shocked. He looked fed-up, as if the young cop was a moron. He raised his hand, about to clarify that "the psycho" was on the roof. Since this hand held the gun, the cop thought Davis was going to shoot. The cop shot Davis in the shin.

Since the bullet nicked him, Davis did not collapse, but began screaming and hopping on one foot. In such sudden agony, shock and horror usurped his face. Deranged as he was, he must have thought this pain meant he was being forced to confess.

"I like them, I like them," he began saying, through his groaning.

The senior cop stared in awe. But since Davis still held the gun, the young cop tackled him. Davis must have interpreted this as an indication he should stifle his confession.

As the cop rolled Davis onto his stomach and handcuffed him, Davis pleaded, "I don't like them; I don't like them."

The cop hoisted Davis to his feet.

Along the street, neighbours, whom the commotion had brought out of their houses, were standing on their steps. They were staring. Davis saw them. Although confused and in pain, he decided to remain silent, a resolve which came over his face as if he were embarrassed it was all he could achieve at the moment. He must also have decided he should leave: he limped, awkwardly due to the handcuffs and his throbbing knee, to the back door of the nearest squad car.

Bewildered, the young cop looked at the older one. Although the latter, too, was
confused, he stared at Davis a few seconds and saw that he was anxious to get in the car.

"Take him downtown, I guess," he said.

The young cop walked to the car, let Davis in, and drove him away, the neighbors' heads turning with the car's procession down the street.

Around this moment, Diana and Elizabeth had come out to see what was going on.

Perhaps since Davis was mayor, the others, too, thought they had a right to know what had happened. Exchanging questions and speculations, about twelve people began moving toward my lawn, where they queried the older officer. But he, too, was confused; he joined their bewilderment. Although I still was on the roof, in my polka-dot robe, no one noticed me, until they slowly realized I likely had the answer. All twelve turned toward me in silence.

"What happened?" asked the officer on behalf of everyone.

I had not bargained on seeing Davis shot and bouncing around on one foot, then being handcuffed and taken away. I was shaken up. Furthermore, although I had everyone's attention, a circumstance I once had desired, the explanation for Davis's behavior was so intimate and complex, that I felt incapable of conveying it. I also remembered my promise to him that I would not reveal his obsession.

As I pondered this, I raised my head in thought. I noticed dark clouds approaching. Upon my staring at the clouds, my neighbors turned to see what I was looking at. But they faced me again, their curiosity undistracted.

Confused, and trying to delay an explanation, I said a strange thing to them, which
I had thought I would never say.

"Looks like we might get some rain."
VITA AUCTORIS

Paul Woolaver was born in 1967 in Antigonish Nova Scotia. He graduated from the Antigonish Regional High School in 1985. From there he pursued degrees in History, English, and Education at Saint Francis Xavier University. He is currently a candidate for the Master's degree in English and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor.